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April 1925

The Frontier

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VOL. 2, NO. 1 APRIL, 1925

The Frontier

HARRY E. MAULE, Editor

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Among them

CLARENCE E. MULFORD and ANTHONY M. RUD

Ready For You on April 20th

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The Puncher

By L. B. Cullen Jones

LIVIN' the life of a puncher free;
Fannin' a bronco on a spree.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!
Beatin' the sun when the day's begun;
Joggin' along when it is done.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!

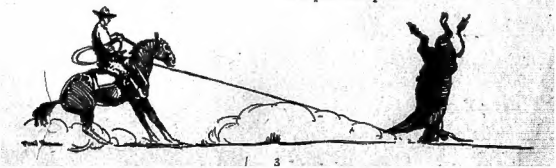
Doin' night-herd under lonesome skies;
Dreamin' away of your home ties.
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!
Cuttin' the steer at the fall "rodeer";
Brandin' the calves when summer's near.
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!

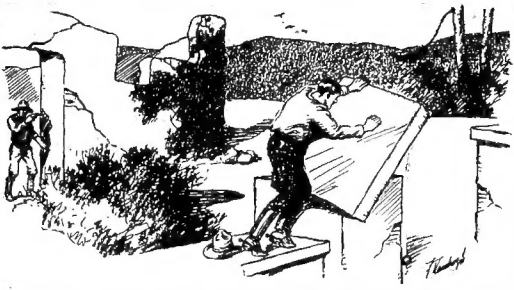
Shinin' the shank of the tinklin' spur;
Puffin' the smoke where night-hawks whirr.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!
Hittin' the trail of the wild "fuzz-tail";
Steerin' the longhorns through the gale.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!

Eatin' some bacon and beans like lead;
Swiggin' black coffee with sourdough bred.
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!
Floppin' your noose on any cayuse;
Cinch up your rig and turn him loose.
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!

Driftin' the beef to the nearest town;
Tradin' your cash for taste dark brown.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!
Feelin' a call in the old cow's bawl;
Leavin' the streets for the timbers tall.
Yippy—yip—yip—yip!

Wastin' your youth—for you get no gold?
Bein' a fool when you are old!
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!
But lovin' the life of a puncher free;
Livin' near God is somethin' to me!
Hoop-la—hoop-la—hoo!





THE LAST DOMINO

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

As if Fate but waited for his arrival, Fletcher's crossing of the Red River from Texas into the old Indian Territory seemed a signal for the eruption of an ancient volcano of hate and violence. Yet through the haze of intrigue and revolver-smoke emerged a true testing for brave hearts.

CHAPTER I

THE PIECES ARE SET

DOMINO players will recall the times that they have set the dominoes on end and then pushed over the last one, to see the others fall. Often, the pieces were so arranged as to form certain letters. Even the letter "Y," so constructed that the last domino, forming the kern of that awkward letter, when it fell would start the movement that knocked down both wings.

Such seems to be the idle sport indulged in by Fate, Chance or Providence—according to one's belief in the matter—when the little atoms we call humanity are set in motion for life's drama.

On a sunny afternoon in late April, two men rode hurriedly down the bank of the Red River, on the Texas side. They gave only a glance at the ferryboat, which was taking aboard a wagon on the opposite side of the stream. Turning into a trail they rode up the river half a mile to a little store, following the water's edge.

This building stood on a shelf of land just above high-water. The low, squat, dingy, unpainted building resembled a huge spider, or a toad squatted there on the river bank. It was thoroughly unlovely, and so was its traffic. The principal business of Mr. Jack Henley was buying very bad whisky at fifty cents a gallon, in barrels, and selling it at a dollar a quart, in bottles. Indian Territory at that time was supposed to be an arid waste, figuratively, under Federal Prohibition. Indians, and many white men who were far worse, crossed the Red River at night and carried this liquid fire into the forbidden territory.

The two young men who now rode up to the front of Henley's store seemed to be in a hurry. Henley, a dark, scowling man, stood in the door.

"Light, gents, and look at yo' saddles," he invited.

"Nope. We ain't got much business on this side of that old creek," said one of the men. "Just pass us out our belts and holsters that we left here, and we'll ride across to where the air's healthier."

He who had spoken was Henry Walford, a white man of twenty-five or so. He was an outlaw. Not that he had ever committed any really great crime, but because he was wanted in Texas for petty offenses,

he had sought shelter among real outlaws, and was a potential criminal of the worst type. The son of a well-to-do Texan, this young man had gone wrong through idleness and indulgence. He now swaggered at the thought of being "wanted".

The other man was slender, with features fine to the verge of effeminacy. He was a light tan in color, with hair that was glossy black, and eyes like sloes. Louis Panola was a half-breed Chickasaw, the son of a white mother. The offspring of mixed races is always a problem. Louis Panola was an unusual problem. He had the small, slender hands of a woman, and the arched instep of his Indian father. He had been educated in the best schools of the country, and was a violinist of great skill. When sober, he was a polished gentleman; when drunk, a fiend from the pit.

The belts and holsters were handed to them as they sat on their horses. Without a word, Panola buckled his belt, drew his revolver from inside his clothing, spun the cylinder, and dropped it into the holster. Then, turning his horse, he rode swiftly down the steep trail and into the stream, Walford at his heels.

A sharp northwest wind was sweeping down the river, whipping its surface into rimpled wavelets. Steadily the ponies fought their way on, the water gradually rising to their sides, and the men holding their feet daintily out of the flood. Gradually again the water grew shallower. At last they trotted out on the other side, and turned down the bank to the main road.

Henley had stood taking in the scene with half-closed eyes. He saw the boat labor its way across, the boatman frantically pulling at his sweep to hold it quartering to the current in the strong wind.

"Huh!" muttered Mr. Henley. "Something must have throwed a skeer into them two fellers. Both cold sober, and didn't even buy a road bottle. Texas is getting right civilized. Since they closed the dance-halls, and cut out music in the saloons, going to a Texas town is about like going to a Sunday School picnic. Still, them fellers is skeered. I wonder what done it." He was puzzled.

The boat landed safely on the Texas side. The wagon drove off with a rattling of the loose flooring of the boat. The two men rode through the fringe of cottonwoods that lined the north bank of the river, and disappeared in the dense bottom, their immediate destination the Cottonwood Ranch, seven miles northeast from the ferry, on a considerable tributary of Red River.

As Walford and Panola disappeared into the thick bottom on the north side of the river, a lone horseman rode down the south bank. He met the wagon, which was laboring through the deep sand of the broad bar, and passed on to the boat landing.

At first glance, this rider was much the same as any that might be met on that same trail. He wore the usual Stetson, flannel overshirt, and trousers stuffed into high-heeled boots. Behind his saddle was tied the inevitable yellow slicker. A more critical inspection showed some almost indefinable difference. There was a peculiarity in his erect position in the saddle and the slight drop of his heel. The exact set of his hat, and the straightforward glance of his eye amounted to a feature of the man. When he spoke, his tone was different. Even when he asked a question, it amounted to an insistent demand for an answer, and that promptly.

Old Shadrach, the negro boatman, noticed the difference. Always polite enough to touch his hat to travelers, the old fellow's hat came off his head entirely at this rider's approach.

Uncle Shadrach was still puffing and wiping the sweat from his face from that last trip in the wind, and he wasn't anxious for another, just yet.

"Boss, y'all could fo'd the river," he ventured.

"Yes?" said the traveler, curtly. "Is it shallow here?"

"No—suh—Boss! Not here she ain't. She'd swim you a hundred yards, and she's sho' quicky."

"What do you mean by saying I could ford it, then?" The question sounded like an accusation.

"Why, suh, de fo'd's up yender by the sto'. It's sorter deep, but if you know the crossin', and yo' hawss knows quicksand——"

"I don't know the crossing, and my horse doesn't know quicksand." And without more ado the man dismounted and led the big brown onto the boat.

Uncle Shadrach noticed that even the horse was different. He was a great beast, of a reddish, seal brown, with a mealy nose. His head was small, his eyes keen and sensitive, and the insides of his nostrils pink.

"How much is the fee, Uncle?" asked the man, as one of the two helpers began

owing the boat up-stream, while the other kept it off the bar with a pole.

"Fo' bits for two-hoss waggins, six-bits for fo'-hoss waggins, and just two-bits for hossbackers."

This stranger's eyes looked like two pieces of deep blue glass. Away back in them a mischievous light danced, as if signaling for a smile that wouldn't come.

"All right, Uncle Shadrach," he said, having learned the old darkey's name from hearing the helpers address him. "All right. We'll just pretend that I'm a six-horse team, and make it a dollar."

"Thank—yuh—Boss!" Then, as Shadrach pocketed the iron man, "Git in de collar dar, Saam! Pole dat boat, Pompey! Y'all s'pose dis ge'man want to be ontwel midnight gettin' over thisyer little old creek?"

Nothing on earth but desire for great speed could stimulate a man to such largess, in Shadrach's mind.

"Don't crowd the boys, Uncle. I'm in no hurry. You've been on this river a long time I suppose," the stranger remarked.

"Yas—suh—Boss! I sho'ly and on-doubtedly has been. I b'long to Old Marse Cliff Bentley, befo' the war. He owns the ferry rights, and he puts me here when I's about twenty. Them Bentleys owns the rights yit, and here Old Shadrach is yit."

"You've seen some pretty rough times, I reckon, with the bad men coming and going."

"Dat I most sho'ly has seen. I's seed 'em kilt comin' on *to* de boat, I's seed 'em kilt goin' off *from* de boat, and I's seed 'em kilt *on* de boat. Yas—suh—Boss!"

The traveler was smiling beneath his tawny mustache, now, and the lights were dancing far back in his eyes.

"She's in the eddy, Uncle Shadrach!" one of the negro boys called out.

"All right, bring in yo' rope. Hold her with yo' pole, Pompey, ontel I gets this sweep sot. Now push her off!"

THE stranger watched the old negro as he heaved the great oar into place, apparently with the strength and ease of a man in middle life. This old slave, who was evidently well beyond fourscore years, churned the water with the oar, and kept the boat headed up-stream, while the current bore it across. The traveler was watching the play of the old man's muscles, and wondering what he must have been like in his prime. Shadrach was an aristocrat of his race, both in physique and intelligence.

"Now," said the stranger, as the boat grounded against the bank, exactly at the landing, "it is getting toward night. Can you tell me where I'll be likely to find lodgings on this road?"

Shadrach scratched the fringe of white wool that encircled his venerable skull.

"Why, suh, I 'lows Mr. Charlie La-Flore's house would be the best place, anyways clost. Hit's about three mile from here. As you go out'n the bottom you come to the corner of a field on yo' left. Just follow the road along that fence, due north, for about two mile. When you come to the next corner, in the aige of the prairie, the road sprangles. The right hand goes to the Cottonwood; the main road goes straight on; and the left hand goes to Mr. Charlie's house. You can see it as soon as you turn the corner."

Smiling at the explicit directions, the traveler thanked the old darkey, pitched a quarter to each of the boys, and, leading the big brown from the boat, mounted and rode through the fringe of cottonwoods that Fate was using for a curtain to her stage.

"Unh-Huh-h! Yas—suh—Boss!" muttered Shadrach, more to himself than to his companions. "I's seen bad ones cross this old river. Seen two plumb sorry rascals fo'd it just a little befo' you rides up. 'Spect y'all sees 'em, too, but you don't let on none. Like as not you's right bad and sudden yo'self, Mr. Man. You 'most make a nigger jump out'n his hide when you speaks to him. You don't ast me who's who, whar he lives, nor what for, but— I could told you it look to me like y'all goin' whar you ain't got no business at all, and you all alone."

Shadrach shook his head slowly. He'd seen men ride boldly across that stream, alone, before. Sometimes he had seen their bodies hauled back in jolting farm wagons.

The object of Shadrach's speculation rode on through the dense bottom. His keen eyes were alert. He saw the red rings on the boles of trees, showing that the water sometimes rose to a depth of twenty feet where he rode. Climbing a sharp ascent from the low bottom, he saw on his left the corner of a field, the road following away north, along a mildewed, vine-grown worm fence. Up the valley stretched a field, as far as the eye could

see. It was studded here and there with age-old, blackened trunks of trees that had never been removed. Certainly, from the size of his field, and the army of men and horses that were tilling it, Mr. Charles LaFlore must be a man of some importance, and not altogether dependent upon the fees of the traveling public for sustenance.

To the traveler's right, the ground sloped into a dense bottom, and through occasional openings in the trees glimpses could be had of broad, sluggish water, like a lake.

There was a strange stillness about the neighborhood. In the two miles to the corner, where the roads "sprangled", he met no one, saw no one, except men working in the great field at a distance. Someone may have "thrown a skeer" into Walford and Panola, as the storekeeper surmised, but it was not this man. He didn't even know of their existence. He didn't know they held places in the fantastic pattern of Fate. Didn't know, in fact, that there was a pattern. Neither had he any idea that he was the last domino.

His name was Joel Fletcher. He had been but recently discharged from the United States Army. The Rough Riders, to be exact, in which famous military organization he had been a captain, and in the heat of the fight at San Juan Hill. He was near six feet in height, though so perfectly proportioned that he didn't look tall. His age was perhaps thirty, though there was white at his temples. He had the appearance of a man who had not lived long but had lived much.

As he rode, Captain Fletcher was musing over his errand. He felt that he was following a myth, but he was keeping a promise made to a dying comrade, the night after San Juan Hill. Fletcher was a man who did not make promises lightly, and who kept them religiously. His errand was a matter that he couldn't talk about to chance acquaintances. In fact, he had never mentioned it to anyone, from the moment he rose from the side of that army cot and walked out into the tropical moonlight. In the first place, it was a secret. Besides that, any man of sane, practical mind would laugh at him for a Quixotic fool, undertaking the impossible.

Old Shadrach had unwittingly been the brown finger of fate to set the pieces in motion. He had pushed the last domino around the corner of that great field, to fall against Charles LaFlore, who was the next figure in this performance of Fate's marionettes.

Chapter II

IN THE HOME OF CHARLES LAFLORE

NOT one man in a passing thousand would Old Shadrach have sent to the home of Charles LaFlore for entertainment. But Shadrach was wise in his knowledge of men. Instinctively, he knew that Captain Fletcher was a fit guest for the LaFlore home.

As Fletcher approached the place, he saw it was out of the ordinary. The huge two-story house of hewn logs, with broad gallery, and open entry between the two front rooms, sat well back in a large yard. A man was working in the rose beds, and a woman was transplanting chrysanthemums.

This was not a place to be hailed as a country tavern. Fletcher dismounted and entered the gate. The master of the house was not far to seek, nor was there likelihood of mistake. As the captain approached the steps a gaunt old man, with snow white hair and mustache, and smoldering black eyes, rose to greet him.

"Fletcher is my name. I——"

"Glad to know you, Mr. Fletcher. Come in. Take this chair; she's more comfortable."

LaFlore extended his hand with the courtly grace of any Southern planter, of the old school. Fletcher took the proffered chair and, feeling that Shadrach had been at fault in sending him there to seek lodging for the night, cast about in his mind for other topics of conversation.

"You have a lovely home here, Mr. LaFlore. Have you lived here long?"

"I was born in this house, sir. My father, William LaFlore, was the leader of the first band of Chickasaws that came from our old home in Mississippi to this reservation. He built the house in 1833. I was born soon afterward."

Fletcher was making a rapid mental calculation, which assured him that this tall, straight old man was around seventy. He needed none to tell him that LaFlore was an Indian and was a descendant of chiefs. The man's bearing, his every word and gesture, proclaimed that fact.

"You do not live in this country, sir?"

"No," replied Fletcher. "I am traveling through, seeking some information. As a matter of fact, I was told that I might find lodging for the night at this house, but some mistake seems to have been made."

"Who sent you here?"

"The old negro boatman at the ferry, sir."

"Shadrach! The black scoundrel! I'll tan his hide for trying to make a tavern of my house!" and LaFlore's eyes flashed. Then a smile glinted in their somber depths. "Really, Mr. Fletcher, I'm indebted to the old rascal for a pleasure. I see too little company, and shall be glad to have you as a guest for the night."

Stepping to the end of the long gallery, he called, and an Indian boy came from the back of the house. The old man spoke rapidly in his native language, and the boy started at once for the front gate.

"Pardon me, Mr. Fletcher, for speaking a strange tongue in your presence, but the boy knows no other. I was telling him to care for your horse."

Fletcher rose to accompany the boy, but the old chief waved him back to his chair.

"My guests do not wait on themselves," said he, resuming his seat.

It took but a short time for Fletcher to discover that his host was a Harvard man. Aside from some slight difficulty with the English idiom, and peculiarly with the matter of gender, LaFlore's language, but for being a bit stilted and old-fashioned, was perfect.

At the supper table there were LaFlore, his wife, and their guest. Mrs. LaFlore, though quite an old lady, was still comely, and her shapely hands were adorned with costly rings. She spoke very little English, and, but for the perfunctory words at acknowledging the introduction, she was for the most part silent.

The meal was served by an Indian woman, who seemed an automaton. A few low spoken words from Mrs. LaFlore, in her native tongue, was all the direction required. The meal was abundant and wholesome.

When supper was finished LaFlore led his guest to the broad front gallery. The moon was near its full. With the coming of night the wind had ceased blowing, and the first whippoorwill of the season was sounding his mournful call. LaFlore offered his guest an excellent cigar, then, setting the box on a convenient stand, filled a long-stemmed pipe for himself. Striking a match, he lighted his guest's cigar, and then his own pipe, and, taking a seat, smoked in silence.

The first few minutes after a full meal was no time for conversation. The comfort and solace of tobacco, the worship of Lady Nicotine, was a rite. As LaFlore sat silently smoking, Fletcher pondered. Questions were boiling in his mind like bubbles on a spring, but he restrained himself. When LaFlore was ready for conversation he would probably signify it.

At last, the old chief exhaled a wonderful smoke-ring, and said, "Do you expect to be in this country some time, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Why, I hardly know, sir. As I told you, I am seeking some information. Isn't there a fort near here?"

"A fort? Not near here, no sir. Fort Sill is about a hundred miles from here," LaFlore answered.

"Oh, so far as that! I had an idea there was one quite near, but you know the country."

"Yes, I know the country, and everything in it," smiled LaFlore. "There is no fort near here. Long ago there were many forts. The Federal Government, when it put us on this reservation, promised to protect us from the wild tribes to the West. They did protect us from them, but—alas—they didn't always protect us from their own soldiers!"

"What were the names of those forts?" asked Fletcher.

"Well, there is Fort Smith, which is in Arkansas, Fort Gibson, in the Creek country, and—ah. Oh, there were many of them. Small posts that have long been abandoned."

"Which was the nearest to this place?" Fletcher questioned again.

"The nearest? Let's see. That would be Fort Kittman."

"How far is that from here?"

"Fifteen miles."

"And what is there, now?"

"Now? It is like something I read in Whittier's poems. How is it her says it—

'Nor Druid mark, nor Runic sign,
Is left me here by which to trace
Its name, or origin, or place.

* * *

'Yet, for this vision of the past,
This glance upon the darkness cast,
A simple stone, a mound of earth,
Can summon the departed forth.'

"It was a great poet, Mr. Fletcher, but it makes me sad. Reminds me of my own people. We are a rapidly vanishing race. Soon there will be but some broken altar by the wayside, a mound of earth, where once some tribesman's hearthstone set, to show that we have passed this way."

LETCHER could but sit in silent wonder at the old man's eloquence. LaFlore dropped his chin on his breast, and sat in stately sorrow for the passing of his people. The white moonlight bathed his venerable form in a flood of silver, and only an occasional smoke-ring indicated that he was not some piece of heroic statuary, set to guard the portal of the house.

Respecting the feelings of his host, it was some time before Fletcher spoke again. When he did, it was to ask another question.

"Is there, then, but a mound of earth, a pile of stones and rubbish, to mark the spot where Fort Kittman stood?"

"Why, no," said LaFlore. "It is not so bad as that. When I last saw the place the walls were still standing, though the doors were down, and the windows like sightless eyes."

"Were you acquainted with some of the officers who were quartered there?"

"Yes, I knew some of them, but I should not be able to recall them. We hated them for what they were, these last troops at Kittman. The post had long outlived its usefulness. A squadron of cavalry garrisoned it. The men were petty thieves, the officers drunkards and gamblers, all ready to do anything for diversion. Not soldiers at all, but glorified caretakers of a castle whose master would never return."

"Did you know Major Powell, the last commandant of the post?"

"I may have known him. The name sounds familiar to me. But, why do you ask, sir?" and the old chief turned his fierce black eyes on the face of his guest. "Is it true that the Government never forgets? Are you an agent of the Federal Government, seeking information after all these years have passed?" There was a note of warning in the voice.

"No, sir. I am in no way connected with the Government. Several months ago I resigned my commission in the army, and am now a humble private citizen, seeking——"

"You were an officer in the army?"

"A captain of volunteers in the Rough Riders, under Colonel Roosevelt."

"I honor you, sir. I was an officer in the Confederate army. Tell me, then, between soldiers and men of honor, what you seek, and I will give such assistance as I can."

"I don't know, Colonel LaFlore, that I can make myself quite clear, without appearing ridiculous in your eyes, which I should regret exceedingly."

The old man's face flushed darkly with pleasure at being addressed by a title which he had won fairly and honorably in the Lost Cause, but which he had not heard for many years. He had been colonel of a famous Chickasaw regiment.

"The truest things in life are often the most seemingly absurd and ridiculous. I assure you that I shall hold to ridicule no matter that you consider seriously," and LaFlore inclined his snowy head in a courtly bow.

"It was such a glorious moonlight night as this," began Fletcher, "but the sweltering heat of the tropics was in the air. A regiment of regulars was camped near our command. Among their officers was a Colonel Powell. He was not a full colonel, but a lieutenant. I didn't wonder, then, that a man nearing sixty, who had spent his life in the service, was not at least a full colonel. I met Powell. He was courteous to me, and I suppose I was flattered to have a colonel in the regular army seek my company. At any rate, we became friends.

"On the night after San Juan Hill an orderly came to my tent and told me that Colonel Powell was sinking rapidly and wanted to see me. As I drew near to his quarters I met the medical officer, who told me to hurry, as Powell could last but a few minutes. When I entered, Powell lay with his eyes closed and the death dew already on his brow. When roused, he opened his eyes, recognized me, and called my name."

Fletcher went on talking, in low tones, the old chief regarding him intently.

"That, Colonel LaFlore, is the thing that has brought me to your country," the captain finally concluded. "I am seeking no personal interest, whatever. I own extensive properties that came to me by inheritance, in south Texas. Besides that, I have a competency that I earned myself, for my life has not been an idle one. I am here but to keep a promise to a dying comrade and to assist in whatever way I can toward righting a wrong that Major Powell committed years ago. He told me that he had always intended to make atonement, but could never quite bring himself to it. I made the promise out there under the tropic moon, where men were dying all about me with fever, and I knew not but I might be the next to go. I have

never broken such a promise, and I shall do my best to keep this one."

"Are you a married man, Captain Fletcher?" There was a deep note of grave concern in the question.

"No, sir," replied Fletcher, with an odd smile. "Why do you ask that?"

"It is important. A married man has not the right to take serious risks. With a single man, who has no dependents, it is his own affair what dangers he incurs."

"I infer that you think I have undertaken a dangerous task."

"Indeed yes, I do think so," LaFlore answered. "I shall tell you the little I know of what you seek, and will give you such assistance as I may, without jeopardizing my own life."

"And I thank you, sincerely, sir, but I am unable to understand——"

"Nor can I fully explain. This much I know. There was a Major Powell, who was the last commandment of the old post before it was discontinued. I know that there was some terrible cause for hatred between Powell and Mr. Erskine. I have heard many things about it, but I do not know them to be true. I was tribal delegate to Washington, for my people, four years, and it chanced that those four years were identical with the four years that Major Powell was at Fort Kittman. The War Department seems to have quartered Powell's squadron at the old post, and then forgotten them.

"It was said that he and his officers were guilty of many things unbecoming officers and gentlemen. It was rumored that even murder was committed there, while the officers were drunk. I can give you no details, but tomorrow you must go to see Mr. Erskine. He is an old missionary who was granted special privileges by the Chickasaws. He is now very old, nearly ninety, perhaps, but still quite active. I know he has been the victim of a great wrong. If you can right it, even in part, God speed you on the errand. He undoubtedly knows all you seek to learn. If he thinks best, he will tell you."

"But, my dear sir, I——"

"Captain Fletcher, it is useless to press me further. I'll tell you frankly that I have not told you all I know. There is some knowledge that comes to us in this checkered life that is not ours to impart, however much we might like to do so."

Fletcher had no reply for this. It was a statement of a truth that he knew only too well. He had not told LaFlore all he knew about the matter.

"Ordinarily," continued the old man, "I would go with you to see Erskine, who is a life-long friend of mine, and a very fine character. Unfortunately, I must go to the capital tomorrow. I am the senator from this district. A special session of our tribal legislature has been called to consider matters pertaining to the final dissolution of our tribal suzerainty and the allotment of our lands. And now, pardon me for my seeming inhospitality in keeping you so long from your bed. In the morning I will direct you to the home of Mr. Erskine. It is not far from the old fort."

Accepting this polite dismissal of the subject, Fletcher rose and followed his host to a comfortable room on the ground floor of the house. LaFlore bade him a courteous good night, and left him.

Soldier though he had been, and accustomed to taking chances, still, it was a long time before sleep came to Fletcher that night.

What could be the danger in examining an old, abandoned fort? Who, after the lapse of a generation, would be interested in the old ruin? These, and a host of other questions assailed the captain's mind. His last thought, before going to sleep, was of the gravity with which LaFlore assured him that he was engaged upon a dangerous enterprise. He grinned, in the darkness of the big room, as he thought of his host's question, whether or not he was married. He was not, nor was he likely to be. His experience with women, in the contemplation of matrimony, had come early in life. Since then, he had seen no woman that he would willingly trust. At this distance from the experience, he was confident that he had made a very narrow and most fortunate escape from great unhappiness. He had no inclination for another like experience.

So, like a good soldier, the day finished, Fletcher banished unpleasant thoughts from his mind, refused to live tomorrow until it came, and went to sleep.

Chapter III

SOME OTHER DOMINOES

WHILE Captain Joel Fletcher was answering to that pushing finger of Fate, and carrying out his impact against Colonel LaFlore, other pieces in the pattern besides Walford and Panola were scurrying to their places in line.

Across the windswept, flower-clad prairie, far to the northwest, rode a lone horseman. He was a lean, flat-jawed man, whose nose resembled a parrot's beak. His gray-green eyes were set close against the sides of the enormous nose, and had an uncannily shrewd leer. The man was disregarding all trails, and pointing straight across the unfenced prairie for the Cottonwood ranch-house.

Jim Corby was a mystery to even the old-timers in that remarkable hiding place of crime and criminals. Who or what Corby was, few people knew. He had been a familiar figure about the cow-camps for many years, and was probably close to fifty. He had no ties of kindred in the country, nor elsewhere so far as anyone knew. He was a shrewd stockman, and had for the last five years held a position as ranch foreman. He talked very little, and rarely had any trouble. There were two excellent reasons. The first was that he avoided trouble when possible. The other was that he ended it with speed and precision, when unavoidable. He wasn't a fancy gun-fighter. He simply shot first and with accuracy, and as coolly as he would rope a steer.

The Cottonwood ranch-house, toward which Corby was still holding his course when the sun went down, was a noted place in its time. It was no relic of the dead past, like LaFlore's home. The house stood on the west bank of the Ashumbala River, the largest tributary of upper Red River. The two-story frame building, modern for its day, fronted the river, which at this point was a broad, deep, glassy pool, more than a mile long. There was a ford at the lower or south end of this pool, a quarter of a mile from the house. At the upper end was the first swift water, where the stream came down from the higher country, into the Red River Valley.

No flowers adorned the grounds of the Cottonwood ranch-house. There, in the midst of a great Bermuda grass lawn, with occasional shade trees, the house stood stark and white in the moonlight. Giant cottonwoods lined the banks of the river, their silver branches mirrored in the surface of the pool. To those trees, in fact, the river owed its name, "Ashumbala" being the Chickasaw word for "cottonwood." It was not that the owners could not afford flowers, but that the minds of the occupants of the house did not run to flowers.

Alex Junay, who owned the Cottonwood, prided himself on its hospitality. He called it a ranch, but in reality it was a large homestead. His ranches and stock were extensive, but in another part of the reservation. To all seeming, the Cottonwood was a country home of the better sort. The occasional dances at this house were elaborate entertainments. People came from miles around, to attend these all-night affairs, where Lucullian feasts were served.

In spite of the reputation of the house, and its master, for hospitality, one shuddered upon first seeing the place. Instinctively, one knew it was a house without a soul. In former times, the place had belonged to Louis Panola, Sr., father of the present Louis Panola and his sister, Mrs. Junay. When the elder Panola died, his white wife took her two children to New Orleans, to educate them.

It was there that Alex Junay met Sarena Panola, a brilliantly beautiful girl. This Frenchman had a shrewd eye to business. He knew of the broad lands that the Chickasaws held in common, and the opportunities there for amassing wealth. He laid siege to the young woman's heart, and, whether he won it or not, he married her.

It was a clear case of barter and sale between Junay and the girl's mother. By the terms of the agreement, Mrs. Panola was to be kept in comfort, and her son educated. Junay had kept his part of the agreement. He had given the woman a comfortable home until she died. Louis he had educated, and, since his return from school, had given him a home and such money as he required.

A dozen years had passed since the marriage. Mrs. Junay, now nearing thirty, childless, and still beautiful, labored under no delusion. She knew she had been sold for a price and acted accordingly.

On this particular evening there was music in the parlor of the big white house. There was not a party in progress. Henry Walford and Louis Panola had reached the place some time before night. After supper, Mrs. Junay, in a fit of loneliness and abstraction sat down to the piano and began to play. Louis joined her with his violin, and rare music filled the house. In a reckless mood, Mrs. Junay began a rollicking dance tune. Looking up, she saw Henry Walford standing at her side.

"Play for Henry and me, Brother, and let us dance," said she.

Panola nodded assent, and went on with the music. A few rugs were moved, and

the couple glided into the dance. Louis was a magician with his violin. There was no break in the music, and for half an hour they danced. Alex Junay came to the door and watched them for a while, with no change in the hard, shrewd expression of his face. He turned away from the door, took his hat and left the house.

Suddenly, without a note of warning, the rhythm of the music changed. The dancers lost step and stopped.

"No more dancing tonight," panted Sarena, fanning herself. "Let's go out on the gallery, where it is cooler."

Louis paid them no heed as they passed out into the moonlinght. His violin was sobbing forth the notes of the "Moorish Love Song."

"Poor Louis! Lola is calling to his heart, now," sighed Sarena. "It must be heaven to have a man love one like that. Some men can't love."

"No man could keep from loving you like that," said Walford boldly.

"I don't think any man has ever loved me," murmured Sarena, as if to herself.

"The trouble with love is that it all seems at cross-purposes." Walford's voice was vibrant with passion. "Those we love will not, cannot, or must not love us."

"Did you ever love anyone?" and her voice was like a caress.

"Don't ask me that, Sarena! You know. If I only dared say——"

"Say what?"

With the strains of the "Moorish Love Song" in his ears, the moonlight on the water, and this beautiful woman touching him, it was maddening. Walford caught her to him, and pressed one burning kiss full on her red lips. For a blissful moment she clung to him, then sprang away, looked cautiously about, and without a word entered the open hall door and ran lightly up the steps to her room.

Walford sank into a chair and placed his feet on the porch railing. The music died out. He heard the temperamental Panola go to his room at the back of the house. There was dead silence about the place. Walford was alone with his thoughts. He had come to this country to escape the law. He had deliberately sought wild adventure, but never had he dreamed of such a position as that in which he now found himself. He had set his lips to the rim of the poisoned chalice of forbidden nectar, and had found it tormentingly sweet. So, Mr. Walford sat and smoked, lighting one cigarette from the stub of its predecessor. There would be little sleep for him that night.

WHEN Alex Junay turned from the dancing couple and left the house, he was either expecting someone, and went out to meet his visitor, or else he possessed a sixth sense and knew someone was coming. He walked out the gate that opened from the pasture into the road, just west of the yard, and turned west along the sandy trail. He had gone a quarter of a mile, and stopped to listen. The sound of hoofs on the trail came faintly to his ears, and a moment later a horseman came in sight, turned out of the road to a clump of elms that stood in a prairie glade, and dismounted.

It was Jim Corby. Junay approached him, and after the greeting the two men squatted down just in the edge of the shadow of the trees.

"Well?" demanded Junay. "How did it come out?"

"Oh, we shipped the five cars of cattle, and I don't think anybody will ever suspect anything. We only got about thirty head of LaFlore's stuff. That old fox keeps a pretty close watch."

"If he knew you got 'em, you couldn't tell it by talking to him," Junay muttered. "The old poker-faced devil!"

"No, but if he ever got the goods on you, you know what he'd do. I been trying ten years to get the old rascal out into the open, and couldn't."

"*Senator* LaFlore," sneered Junay.

"Yes, senator. You've always cursed and sneered at the Indians, with their toy republic within a republic, but you've underrated their individual shrewdness. Old Charlie LaFlore has got your number, and has had it since the day you came to the country, and took over the holdings of his ancient enemy, old Louis Panola. He's been waiting all this time to get you where he wants you. I told you long ago what to do with him, but——"

"Oh, your methods are too primitive, Jim. I know it is a theory that dead men tell no tales, but sometimes they speak loudest when they are in their coffins. Especially such men as Charlie LaFlore. He stands too well with his own people, and with what is called the better element of white men in this country. I'm satisfied with levying tribute on his herds, and——"

"That's one thing I want to tell you,"

Corby interrupted. "In a mighty short time there'll be no herds to levy on. The tribal legislature meets tomorrow, to consider the final ratification of the treaty by which these lands are to be allotted, and the remainder sold; then——"

"Yes, yes, I know. We've been hearing that for the last five years, and we are no nearer——"

"Alec, there is no fool so great as the one that refuses to learn. Can't you see that this is the last little bit of the old West? Can't you see that this little section along the lower reaches of the Ashumbala is about the only place now, where life can be lived as in the old days?"

"Why, I don't know much about the old days, as you call them," Junay replied. "I——"

"No. You have never seen much of the West. I've seen it all. In ten years I have seen the herds of wild horses disappear from these prairies. I've seen cabins and plowed fields in places that I never expected to see inhabited. I give you fair warning that the Chickasaws are not being asked to consent to this allotment of their lands. They're being told. A year from now you and your wife will hold a few hundred acres, and some acorn-eating "tubby" from the creek bottom will have laid his allotment on the best of your land, and will have sold as much of it as the law will allow to a white settler."

Junay swore a bitter oath at the suggestion. He planned to clean up enough money in the next five years and go back to New Orleans, where he could live as a gentleman should.

"Oh, there's no good in growling," continued Corby. "It's coming. I've warned you before, but you paid no attention. All that is your business. I want to talk about *my* business."

"Your business?"

"Yes, my business. Have you come to think that it is a sin and a crime for me to have any business except your business?" The gray-green eyes seemed trying to look out between the same lids.

"Why—why, no, but—" Junay stammered.

"Well, I've got business of my own. For five years I have been foreman of one of your ranches. I've witnessed bogus bills of sale to herds of steers that you have bought from Texas cattlemen, for the purpose of holding their stuff on this Indian range until it is fat, and getting paid for it. I've stolen whole train loads of those cattle, shipped them to market, and you got the money. Do you think I've done all this for fun?"

"Why, certainly not. You have been paid. This is the first time I ever knew that you were not satisfied with the arrangement we had."

"Oh, I haven't been dissatisfied. I'm not dissatisfied now, I've just quit, that's all. I left one of the other boys in charge of the ranch, and I'm not going back."

CORBY squatted; with his long legs folded up, his sharp chin and beak-like nose, he resembled some great, evil bird. He coolly rolled a smoke and waited for Junay to speak. The little Frenchman, who was a midget by the side of Corby's six-foot-two, regarded the old puncher furtively from under his hat brim. What had come over Corby? What did the wily old thief have up his sleeve? He had split fairly with Corby, according to his own greed-poisoned ideas of fairness. Corby smoked on in silence. Junay got nervous, and his little, round, restless black eyes stared from under the hat brim, while his thin nostrils worked like those of a rat that suspected a trap.

"I don't understand this, Jim," he ventured, at last. "You've always got your share."

"Yes, I know what I got. You have sent twice as much to your bank in New Orleans each year as I have gotten in the five I've been with you."

Junay moved uneasily. Corby smiled grimly in the moonlight.

"Oh, I don't blame you for looking out for number one," he went on. "That's what we all do. But, if you want to go back to your old home and live like a prince on what I've helped you steal, you'll have to kick in and help me."

Never before had Corby been so brutally frank about thefts. Never had he openly called it stealing. What could the man be leading up to?

"Help you to what?" asked Junay, with a quiver of the thin nostrils.

"Help me to get something I want, just as I've helped you."

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"Just what I say. I came into this country with a definite purpose—and it was not to punch cows, except as a means to an end. The time has come for me to clean up. It can't be put off any longer. A

year from now, there will be ten times as many people in this country, and each one that comes will make it more difficult for me."

"What is this clean-up?"

"That is *my* business," Corby retorted.

"And what do I get, if I agree to help you?"

"Remember a little trip I made down to New Orleans a year or two ago? Went down to Mardi Gras." Corby blew a cloud of white smoke.

"Well what of it?"

"Nothing much, only you don't get a sou markee, and you do just what I tell you to do, or——"

"See here, Jim, there's a limit to that kind of stuff," Junay remonstrated. "I won't——"

"Oh, yes, you will, though! While I was there I heard a very interesting story about a big colonial mansion with white pillars, and cape jessamines growing in a hedge about the place. I think the fellow said it was on Bayou La Touche, or some such name, and——"

"You fiend of hell!" snarled Junay. "What is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to keep in front of me, whenever we are together from this on, is one thing," drawled Corby. "I don't want to have to kill you—yet. I need you. I'm not going to ask much of you. I merely want you to kill old Charlie LaFlore, and——"

"Kill Charlie LaFlore! Why, that's im——"

"Oh, no. Not impossible. I know what happened to better men than LaFlore who happened to get in your way. LaFlore's in *my* way. I'd do the job myself, with a good deal of pleasure, but, being a United States citizen, I'd be hung for killing one of the Government's innocent wards. You, being a citizen of this delightful little toy republic, you'd be tried in the Indian courts, which you know are a farce. You don't have to fire the shot yourself. Let Walford do it. He wants to be a bad man."

"I can't trust Walford. He's——"

"You'll never be able to trust him, until you get something on him. Make him kill old Charlie LaFlore, and you'll have him where he'll eat out of your hand."

"But, I can't make him do it!"

"No?" Corby's eyes glittered like those of a snake. "Alec, as great a rogue as you are, at times you are the most innocent, unsuspecting damned fool I ever saw in my life. Your wife can make Walford fetch and carry like a Spaniel puppy. Let her make Walford kill LaFlore. Then, any evening after dark you can——"

"What the hell do you mean?" and Junay's hand flashed to the gun at his hip.

"I'm a little different from the men on Bayou La Touche, Alex. Don't try it," drawled Corby, without making a move. "It don't seem possible to me that a man that ain't plumb stone blind could fail to see what's going on."

"We won't discuss that, if you please," interrupted Junay, with a flash of the dignity and decency that had been taught him in his youth.

"Oh, very well," shrugged Corby. "It was only an incident in passing, and nothing to do with the main business. I want LaFlore out of the way, and you are going to put him out. Use your own means. LaFlore will start to Tishomingo at daylight tomorrow morning."

"When do you want this—this thing done?" Junay's face was a writhing white mask of fear.

"When? Now. I never begin a job until I'm ready. Then I finish it. Within two days I expect to be out of this country for good."

"Where is this job you're going to pull?"

"One thing at a time, and that well done, is a mighty good motto," said Corby. "I'm telling you all that it's necessary for you to know. Meet me right here, at this time tomorrow night, with the positive assurance that LaFlore's dead, and that Lola is spending the night at your house."

With a terrified glance about him, Junay rose and started toward the house.

"You have nothing to fear from me," growled Corby, as the little man turned away, "unless you try to put something over on me, and then——"

To the cringing Junay, Corby's voice had the dull, hollow sound of clods falling on a coffin. As he walked toward the house his mind was in a turmoil. Once he glanced over his shoulder. Corby was squatting where he had left him. At a little distance, his elbows seemed to grow into wings, completing his resemblance to a vulture. Junay was stunned. He had thought Corby was his slave, and suddenly the foreman had become his master. A white-columned mansion on the bank of Bayou la Touche rose before him in the moonlight. The sound of a shot, running footsteps, the clattering of a horse's hoofs—all came to memory's ear with a shudder. How had Corby found out? How much did he know? No matter, he knew

enough. Junay must do one of two things —obey Corby, or kill him. It was then that he glanced back, and saw the old cowpuncher sitting motionless as a rock. To kill Corby was a task that few men would relish, and certainly not this little French crook.

HEN Junay had disappeared, Corby mounted his horse and rode far out on the prairie. Here he unsaddled his mount, lariated him to the saddle horn, and, using the saddle for a pillow, lay down to rest. It would be a stealthy assassin, indeed, who would slip up on this man. He had waited long for this hour. He had been twenty years getting ready for a day's work. It would be fast and furious, but nothing could be done until he knew LaFlore was dead, and that would not be until the next night.

There were two reasons why Corby wanted LaFlore killed. One was that he hated the old chief for his decency and honor. The other was that LaFlore had once foiled him in his purpose, unknowingly, and would be a menace to him after the deed he had in mind was done.

There were others who were not sleeping, on account of Corby's scheming. Junay, after a hurried conversation with his wife, went to bed, to roll and toss in agony of mind.

On the broad front gallery at the Cottonwood, Henry Walford sat smoking, in silent reverie. Hearing a light step, he looked up and saw Sarena. She laid her fingers on her lips for silence, and an instant later she was in his arms.

"See what my love for you has made me do," she whispered. "If Alec should find me here—" With a start, Walford glanced toward the open hall door. "What would you do for your love of me?" and she cuddled closer to him.

"Anything on earth that you might suggest," whispered Walford, lying in his heart, but really believing it himself.

She whispered in his ear, and he shuddered.

At length she asked, softly, as she passed her hand over his hair, "Would you do that much for me?"

"Yes, even that," he replied bravely, though his whole soul was in revulsion.

She raised her lips to his again. Walford was in an agony of fear, but the poison had entered his soul. He wanted to be known as a bad man, but his badness must be something that would pique his vanity. Killing in an open gunfight. Taking by force that which was not his. He was a victim of the romanticism of crime, as seen by very young persons. She had asked him to commit a crime that had no tang of romance.

Alex Junay had been driven by fear to do the foulest thing the human mind can conceive. It had not been hard for him to induce his wife to play upon Walford's passion for her. In the first place, there had been an unsatisfied blood-feud between the elder Panola and LaFlore, and she had inherited it. Louis was a child when he was sober, gentle, diffident and retiring as a woman. When he was drunk he was a fiend, but his fiendishness didn't run to avenging old scores. It rather tended to the matter of making new ones, and venting itself on the nearest object. She would by glad that LaFlore was dead. Carrying out the design as she had made it would be avenging her father, whose life was shortened by carrying in one lung a bullet that Charles LaFlore had fired. True, Panola had started the hostilities, but that made no difference.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROKEN COLUMN

APTAIN FLETCHER was awakened early. At the breakfast table Mrs. LaFlore didn't appear. LaFlore and his guest, waited on by the stealthy Indian woman, ate in silence. The old chief seemed to be revolving some weighty matter in his mind. Fletcher had no appetite, beyond a cup of coffee and a biscuit. There was nothing in his mind but a jumble of questions that he couldn't ask without offending his host, and which he knew would not be answered.

"I hope you'll pardon my haste, Captain Fletcher," said LaFlore, as they rose from the table. "It is more than thirty miles to Tishomingo, and I must be there by noon. My team is ready, and your horse is at the gate. Our way lies together for several miles."

Fletcher's big brown was tied by the side of the team, and the two men got in the buggy and left the house together. From a curtained window Mrs. LaFlore watched them drive away, perhaps with that prescience sometimes accredited to wo-

men who love their husbands intensely.

Their conversation was fragmentary. The sun had not yet risen, and even under the most favorable circumstances talk would not flow freely at such a time. Fletcher's mind was full of the strange adventure he was on. LaFlore, when he spoke at all, talked of the purpose for which the legislature was meeting. He seemed to sense that it was the last grand council of his tribe. He knew the traditions of his people—how they had once been a powerful nation, in their home beyond the Mississippi. With the passing years it had dwindled to a mere handful. Now, it was to be broken up and absorbed by the white wave that had been driving them relentlessly westward for two centuries.

"Sir," said LaFlore, "you are a stranger among us, and doubtless wonder at the peculiar name of our capital. Tishomingo was a great chief of the Chickasaws, generations ago. You had your Washington; we had our Tishomingo. It is in my heart to wish that there may never come a time that the name of Washington will be but a memory, clouded in the obscurity that must soon envelope the name of Tishomingo."

Again the old chieftain lapsed into brooding silence. Five miles from the LaFlore home, and with the sun just risen, the buggy stopped.

"Here we must part, Captain Fletcher. Your way lies along the trail that leads through those low hills, directly to the northeast. Give my regards to Mr. Erskine. Tell the good old man that I sent you to him; that I trust you, as one honorable gentleman should trust another, and hope you may be able to help him solve a problem that has given him much sorrow. So long as you are in this country make my house your home, at your own convenience."

Handing Fletcher a letter, addressed to The Rev. Robert Erskine, in a clear, bold hand, the old man gripped the captain's hand and drove away. The road that he followed was a typical trail of the country. It had been used for seventy years, without repair. When one road became impassable, another was made by the side of it. In places it was more than a hundred yards wide.

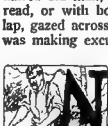
Fletcher stood watching the departing buggy and thinking of this strange old man. He was a creature of the past. This new century that was dawning, with its rush of progress, would see the last of such men on earth. They were relics of an already forgotten generation. To Fletcher, this old man resembled a single beautiful column that remained standing in the ruins of a fallen temple, a column already leaning to its fall. He wondered how long it would stand in the tempest of modern times.

Mounting his horse, the adventurer followed the trail toward the curtain of blue hills in the distance. What was that problem that had so long puzzled the mind of Mr. Erskine? What part of his story had Colonel Powell failed to tell him on that sultry, tropical night?

As he rode toward the blue hills, Joel Fletcher would have been a hard problem for a student of men. His every word and act was of polished ease. His voice, in spite of its incisive note, was kindly as a rule. Without knowing it, he was himself a problem to the stranger who met him. It was disconcerting to see such a man riding boldly through a country known to be infested by criminals. It was more disconcerting to see him riding into the very stronghold of crime. So it had impressed LaFlore, but he had said no word. If he thought this man would be helpless among outlaws, he had made no mention of it.

The trail lay over the hills, rather than through them, for they were not large enough to need passes. The timber was open, with occasional prairie glades. The countryside was a riot of wildflowers. A doe and fawn sprang across the trail, and scampered away. A little farther on a flock of wild turkeys trotted unafraid through an opening, their feathers glistening in the sunlight. The scene set Fletcher's blood racing.

There could be no danger in such a place. He was but going to call on an aged minister. He pictured Erskine as a frail, white-haired old man, who sat in his chair and read, or with book and spectacles on his lap, gazed across the hills, while his mind was making excursions into the past.



NOT a house, fence, or any evidence of human activity had he seen since parting from LaFlore. The trail dipped gently down into the Ashumbala Valley. Here, the primitive forest stood, thick and untouched by the woodsman's ax. Within a few hundred yards of the bank of the river the trail

ran through a little glade. Close beside the trail stood a dilapidated cabin. Two ponies browsed near the cabin, while a man was cutting up the white meat of a catfish on a block near the cabin door. He looked up at Fletcher's approach.

"Good mawnin', stranger!" he hailed. "Y'all are right lucky, yo'self. Light, and let yo' braunk graze. The cawnpone is cooked, the coffee's b'ilin', and the grease is smokin' for the feesh."

The ride had revived Fletcher's appetite, and he was glad of this chance to fortify himself for what was ahead of him. The man was obviously alone and yearning for company. He appeared to be in his early fifties, but strong as an ox. He was of medium height, but stockily built, with slightly bowed legs. There was a peculiar squint to his eyes, as if he had spent much time out-of-doors or had smiled a great deal in his life. As he bent over to drop the white strips of catfish into the smoking grease, Fletcher noticed his breadth of hip and shoulder, and the play of great muscles under his shirt, as it drew taut across his back.

"Just a-thinkin' as you rid up, stranger, what a pity it was for one lone old man to try to kill hisself eating a ten-pound catfeesh. Dang my hide, if I war'n't."

"Mighty glad to relieve you of part of the responsibility," smiled Fletcher.

"I'll be bounden you are. Fit a cup off'n that limb, and pour yo'self some coffee. Feesh cooks pretty sudden, when the grease is smokin'."

The old fellow soon had his guest's plate heaped with hot cornpone, and crisply fried fish. Then, he helped himself, and they fell to with a will. When the limit of capacity had been reached, they stretched out comfortably in the shade and lit their pipes.

"Ain't livin' around here, I reck'n," said the host.

"No. Just traveling."

"'Lowed not. Yo' hawss stock's some different. Soldiered some, ain't yuh?"

"Yes, but how did you know it?" Fletcher asked in some surprise.

"Lord, son, I kin tell 'em, if they ain't served but three months. I reck'n you've heared tell, mebbe, of how the troops at the frontier posts always had a hunter to furnish meat for the outfit. A soldier couldn't kill game; they couldn't find no place; and—right smart of 'em warn't worth a sing-barrelled dang for nothin' else."

"Yes, I've heard of these hunters."

"Well, I'm one of 'em, or was. I reck about the last one that's left on earth. An' this is about the last place left that there's anything to hunt. Bill Sandridge is my name."

"Joel Fletcher is mine."

"Powerful glad to know you, Mr. Fletcher," and Bill grasped his guest's hand in the true old Western style of sizing up your man first and getting acquainted afterward. There was something almost uncanny in the accuracy with which those old plainsmen judged men. They rarely missed their guess, but when they did they were apt to miss badly. "Been soldiering some, you say?"

"Yes. I was in the Rough Riders, with Colonel Roosevelt."

"Sho' now! Officer or private?"

"Captain."

"Sho' now! Dang my ornery hide if I ain't gettin' quality right along. I reck'n you can stand the company, though, Cap'n Jo. Old Gineral Woods hisself has took potluck with Bill Sandridge, in the old days, and dang glad of the chance, believe me. Knowed him when he was a major."

"Have you been in this country long?" Fletcher asked.

"Ain't been here long this time, but I know ever' trail that a lizard could travel, and ever' branch that runs when it rains, in this whole Injun country. I was a hunter at Old Fo't Kittman, ontel they got too dang scan'lous tough for me. Cap'n, them officers and their men was a disgrace to the whole army. Why, damn my—but maybe I hadn't ought to talk about one officer to another."

"I'm just a private citizen, now," said Fletcher. "Besides that, it has always seemed to me that officers in the army should be models of rectitude for their men. In my mind, a degraded officer is lower than the dissolute common soldier, to whom he sets a bad example."

"Sho' now! Dang my cats if you ain't said just what's allers been in my mind, but hit would have took me a week to say it that plain."

"You say you left Fort Kittman because they got too tough, Mr. Sandridge. Who was it that got too tough?"

"Beggin' yo' pardon, Cap'n Jo, but, if you don't mind, just call me Bill Sandridge, or plain Bill. It fits better. That mister business might make me uppish. I ain't never been used to it."

"All right, Bill. I'm democratic in my ideas, but why do you call me captain?"

"That's right smart different. You've

seen a cap'n. I've heared tell that if a man ever lives right to be called a cap'n, judge, honorable, or anything that way, he's got a right to pack the title as long as he keeps on livin' that way. I got a notion you done that. Now me, I ain't never been no mister. Just Bill, that's all, and I tries to live up to it, square."

FLETCHER accepted his host's philosophy of titles without comment, and waited for him to continue.

"As I says, I'm eight year at Kittman, drawin' Gov'ment pay, and hunting in these hills and draws. Sometimes I scouts with the soldiers, but mostly I just hunt. Finally, they gets the Comanches and Apaches, Cheyennes and Arapahoes, and all them bad wild tribes onto the reservation about Sill and Reno. Then, troops ain't needed at Kittman. She's Government property, and has to be took care of, so they puts a major and four troops of cavalry there, and goes off and leaves 'em. Then's when I quit."

"Strange time to quit, when the work got lighter," commented Fletcher.

"Maybe you ain't found it out yit, Cap'n Jo, but light work don't always bring happiness in this old world. That squadron of soldiers didn't have a thing on earth to do but keep house, and yet they was the most unhappiest, dissatisfied lot of men that I ever seen in my whole life, and I seen dang nigh all the soldiers in Ameriky. The men fit among themselves, and gambled what money they drew and drank what whisky they could get. The officers gambled, drank all the whisky they could hold, and done worse.

"Old George Cantrell was sutler at the post. He's out for the money, like most sutlers is. It finally comes to me that the post commandant and Cantrell is in cahoots. The major winks while George runs a reg'lar gamblin' den and whisky joint in the back end of the sutler's store. They robs the soldiers; they robs the Injuns—and Old George Cantrell and the major splits the profits. I goes into this place just one time. Next day I drawa my pay and rides. I ain't been to Kittman since. I knowed bad trouble was bound to come, and that warn't no place for Bill Sandridge, what had always tried to be square."

The old fellow knocked the ash from his pipe, refilled it, and smoked in contemplative silence. Fletcher measured the man shrewdly with his eye.

"How long was Major Powell at Fort Kittman?" he asked after a while.

Bill started from his reverie, and the coal fell from his pipe.

There was a look of astonishment in his face, as he said, "Sho' now! I ain't named no names, have I?"

"Sometimes when one is talking he lets things slip that he doesn't mean to say." Fletcher's blue eyes were as expressionless as two blue glass marbles.

"I didn't aim to name no names," Sandridge added, in some agitation. "I hope Major Powell warn't no relation of yo'n."

"No relation whatever. I'd really like to hear the story of what he did at Kittman. Must have been a pretty snappy performance from what you say."

"Yes," drawled the old hunter, "it was right snappy, the way I got it. It appears that before he got through he committed a lot of bitter crimes that couldn't never be squared."

"What were those bitter crimes?"

"Sho' now! Bein' as I left Kittman right at the first beginning of the mess, all I know is hearsay, but she comes pretty straight. The quartermaster's sergeant and me was pretty good friends. He was a quiet, decent sort of a soldier man, and stayed out of the row all he could. I see him about ten year ago, at a post out in Arizony, and he tells me what happens after I left Kittman.

"Things goes from plumb bad to a whole lot worse. Powell and his squadron has been there about two year, and it seems like the War Department has done forgot they are on earth. They've got women at the fort; they got whisky when they want it; and they gamble and fight for amusement. Powell, he allows the women at the fort, but he don't take to 'em none hisself. He's got another idea, and a black, wicked one at that."

Bill spat, as if the recital put a bitter taste in his mouth.

"About two miles from the old fort lived Parson Erskine. He was a sort of missionary to the Injuns, and they grants him some special rights. Forty acres of land and a mule, or something like that. The old parson's wife is dead, and just him and his daughter lives there in the cabin alone. Powell gets his eyes on the girl, and hell can't stop him. The old man don't notice what's goin' on ontel it's too late, and when he does he puts his foot down too hard, just as most men does. He

just oils up his old forty-five, shows Powell the gate, and tells him what'll happen if he comes back.

"Next night, the girl disappears. Parson Erskine buckles on his gun and goes to the fort. Major Powell is gone on a trip. The sergeant tells me that nobody knowed where Powell and the girl went, but just supposed they went scallyhootin' around the country. In about a week they comes back and goes to keeping house in Powell's quarters. The Major gives orders that Erskine ain't to be allowed about the fort, and he won't let the girl go to see her father.

"Powell never left the fort after that. He gambles and drinks all night in the back of Cantrell's store, then sleeps it off in the daytime. About a year after Powell and Erskine's girl takes up together, a baby's born. All this time, Powell and Erskine gets bitterer and bitterer to'ds each other. Powell is so mortal afraid of the old preacher that he's plumb miserable onhappy.

"Then one day the whole thing blows up like a rocket. There's a general war in the sutler's place one night. Old George Cantrell gets killed. Two Injuns and four loafers that's supposed to be whiskyrunners, goes the same way, and one soldier is killed and half a dozen sent to hospital. Come morning, and they find the Erskine girl dead in Powell's quarters, with her baby asleep by her side. All kinds of things was whispered about the fort, but whether it was poison, strangling, or natural, nobody knowed.

"Next day, a colonel comes to the fort. I ain't namin' no names, but he's a gin'ral now, and a mighty old one at that. He had come, after so long a time, to close up the fort and remove the troops. He tried to straighten the mess out, but couldn't get heads nor tails of it. I reck'n he did the best he could to protect Powell and his staff.

"Before the troops left, which was in a few days, Powell sent this quartermaster's sergeant down to the old parson's cabin with the baby, a whole passel of its clothes, and a shot sack full of gold money. The old man lays the baby on the bed, and the bundle of clothes by it. Then he hands the money back to the sergeant and tells him to take that filthy money back to Powell, and to tell him if he ever sets eyes on him he intends to kill him. He'd care for his daughter's child, but Powell could expect nothing but hate from him.

"Powell was sober now and feeling kinder softened and repentant, but, when the sergeant tells him what all old Erskine said, he goes plumb ragin' wild, and they have to watch him ontel he leaves. He swears awful vengeance on the old man, but they don't give him no chance to do nothin'."

Bill Sandridge filled his pipe, put a live coal on it, and puffed in silence.

"A sordid, wicked, ugly story," said Fletcher.

"Yes. Right sordid, and all you say, but that's the way she comes to me. You wouldn't expect such wickedness in a wonderful, clean, open country like this, but wickedness happens wherever wicked men and foolish women meets. I don't vouch for that yarn bein' plumb true, but I wouldn't put nothin' past Powell, in them times. That's all the story, except——"

"Except what?"

"Old George Cantrell had a boy, a young buck private in one of the squadrons. He had the makin's of a real wicked mean desperator in him. He had two more years to go in the service when the troops was took from Fort Kitt. The sergeant tells me that this boy says he's got a reckoning coming with Powell, but I don't know's he ever had it."

ILL SANDRIDGE went on smoking. Fletcher made no comment. He was appalled at the enormity of Powell's crime, if there was any truth at all in the story. As he sat turning the matter over in his mind, the two ponies of the old hunter came up to them and whinnied. Bill got up, took some bread and a bit of sugar from his camp kit, and fed it to them.

"Kinder spoiled pets," said Bill, as he noticed Fletcher looking at his performance. "This one is the pack pony. I calls him Terrapin' 'cause he's so tarnation slow. The one I rides I calls Lazy Ned, after a story I sees in a old school reader."

"How far is it to this old Parson Erskine's cabin?" asked Fletcher, when Bill had resumed his seat in the shade.

"'Bout a mile. The trail forks just the other side of the river. The right hand goes to the cabin, and the left hand climbs the hill to the old fort. May not be no cabin there, now, though."

"I want to make some investigations around the old fort, Bill. You know this country pretty well, and if you are not

busy, I'd like to employ you for a guide, for a few days." Fletcher's tone was as noncommittal as that of any Eastern relic hunter.

"Well, I reck'n I could stand that much hard work, and a little tobacco money would come in right handy," Sandridge agreed.

"All right. I'll let you set the wages when you find out how hard the work is. Just now, I'm going to see Mr. Erskine. Do you want to go along?"

"Going to see him? No; I reck'n I'm too young yet to go where he is, even if he is a preacher. That old man's bound to be dead long ago. He was an old man when I was a young fellow."

"No, I have been told that he lives in his cabin near the old fort."

"Well, all I got to say is that, if he's still there, he's bound to be a twin brother to that fellow Mathooslum. He's bound to be around a hundred. I reck'n I better move camp while you're gone. This is a mighty pore place for a scout's layout."

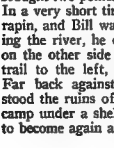
"How'll I find you, when I come back?" Fletcher asked.

"When you get back to where you took the right hand trail, just stop and listen. If you hear ary turkey yelpin', like it's lost from the flock, just whistle a bit of "Dixie" and wait a minute."

Fletcher rode away down the trail to the ford. Bill Sandridge watched him through narrowed lids until he crossed and disappeared on the other side. Then the years fell from the old hunter. He was all life and activity. A shrill whistle brought two ponies scampering to his camp. In a very short time the pack was on Tarrapin, and Bill was on Lazy Ned. Crossing the river, he entered the thick bottom on the other side and, turning out of the trail to the left, disappeared from view. Far back against the bluff upon which stood the ruins of Fort Kittman, he made camp under a shelving place and prepared to become again a scout of the old days.

Chapter V

At the Erskine Cabin



ON THE mile ride from the crossing of the Ashumbala to the Erskine cabin Fletcher's mind was extremely busy. Was it chance that had thrown Bill Sandridge in his way? The story Sandridge had told him was a pitiful, sordid, disgusting thing. A thing that almost made him sorry he had ever been an officer in the army. It was the other side of the story that Colonel Powell had told him on that sultry Cuban night. Even with his faltering hand on the mystic curtain that soon must admit him to another world, Powell, though he made Fletcher his father confessor, could not bring himself to mention this vile feature of his past—if the story were true.

Powell had said nothing of a child as he stammered out his story with failing breath. This may have been because he knew his time was too short for the wretched tale that old Bill had told. It may have been that, broken and contrite as he seemed to be in his last hour on earth, he hadn't the moral courage to lift this black curtain of the past.

Fletcher recalled the scene in Powell's tent with such vividness that sweat broke out on his face. He could hear again the low, gasping voice saying: "It was a cruel, bitter punishment that I sentenced Erskine to. I hated him, but that hate is dead. Go to Fort Kittman. Take Erskine with you, and look—in—the——"

Fletcher had bent his head low but caught only a few more seemingly meaningless, incoherent words. That was the last. The young captain had solemnly promised at the beginning of the interview that he would comply with Powell's dying request as soon as he was free from the service. He had kept the promise, so far, but now he was disgusted with the sordidness and moved with the pity of it all. He couldn't go to this old man, after all that he had suffered at Powell's hands, and ask him to forgive the memory of the man who had wronged him. Minister of the Gospel though he might be, this was too much to ask of human nature.

What had LaFlore meant by hinting at danger? The country was all but uninhabited. The only human being he had seen so far was an innocent, childlike old hunter, who had stolen back to the scenes of his youth to live a little season in the past. Was it possible that LaFlore thought this aged minister might attempt to harm him, merely for bringing a message from his enemy? That was not at all likely. What then could be the danger?

With a heavy sigh Fletcher snatched himself from the pit of abstraction into which he had fallen. The trail emerged from the thick woods, and before him, under the sheltering arms of a grove of great elm trees, stood the Erskine cabin.

Three small log rooms, some out-buildings, and a little field nearby.

With no thought of what he should say to Erskine, Fletcher dismounted and approached the house. He noted the rose-bushes in the yard, a honeysuckle vine on a corner of the cabin, and flower beds bordered with rough stones. A hen was clucking to her brood, and an air of peace and wholesome content was over the place. Why should he, at the request of the man who had thrown a shadow over this humble home, go in there and open afresh the old wounds? He gladly would have turned and fled the premises, but as he looked a man came to the door to welcome him.

Fletcher had been a stout-hearted campaigner, whom surprises affected little, but neither LaFlore nor Bill Sandridge had told him that this old preacher was a giant!

Erskine was nearly seven feet high, and of mighty frame. His hair and beard were white as wool, but the skin of his face was a ruddy tan, and his eyes as keen as those of middle age.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted the visitor.

Fletcher returned the greeting, and said, "Fletcher is my name. I suppose you are Mr. Erskine."

"Yes, that is my name. Come in, Mr. Fletcher." The old minister shook hands cordially.

"I have a letter to you, from Mr. LaFlore, and——"

"Pardon me, sir," the minister interrupted, "but we are just ready to sit down to our noonday meal. Give me your hat and walk in."

Fletcher had seen this type of man before. He knew the note of hospitality in Erskine's voice, and he also knew that to refuse would be to offend.

"I know any man that Charles LaFlore sends to me is worthy as a guest. The letter can wait until we have finished dinner."

So saying, the old giant led the way into another room. It was a long shed that extended full length of the other two rooms, without a partition. One end of this was kitchen, and the other dining-room.

"My daughter, Miss Erskine, Mr. Fletcher," introduced the old minister.

They sat down, and, after a short and solemn grace, Erskine covered their plates with the homely, wholesome food. In spite of the fact that he was not hungry, after the late breakfast of fish with Bill Sandridge, the visitor forced himself to eat. He possessed enough will power to do this, but not enough to keep his eyes from the young woman.

WELL he might find this a hard task. She was not really a beautiful woman, according to the usual standards, but there was an indefinable charm about her. She was rather above the medium in height, and well rounded. Not a girl, but a mature woman. Her features were even, but strong, her mouth being large, almost to the point of marring her otherwise pleasing face. Large, straight looking, and deep hazel eyes, and slightly wavy dark brown hair. But it was not her features, pleasing though they were, that held the charm. It was her poise. Her perfect certainty of herself in all she did or said.

This young woman joined with ease in the conversation, and her language indicated culture. She was that sort of rather large woman that could rise from a table or return to it, without the least show of awkwardness.

"So, this was Powell's daughter," mused Fletcher, as he divided his time between mincing his food and looking at the girl. "Strange that there was no shadow of embarrassment or self-consciousness on her part." He puzzled over it throughout the meal, until it dawned on him that she didn't even know it! Erskine had introduced her as his daughter, and he doubtlessly had led her to believe that she was his daughter.

While Fletcher's mind was puzzling over this, something else within him was saying, "You have never seen a woman like this before."

The meal finished, Erskine and his guest went out to some chairs in the shade of the old elms. Mr. Erskine lit his pipe.

"Now Mr. Fletcher," he said, "you may give me the letter from my old friend, if you please."

If there had been any way to avoid it, Fletcher would gladly have withheld that letter, but there was none. He produced it, and passed it to his host. The old man read the letter to the end. His brow was like a mountain with a storm cloud gathering on it.

"Why is it you are not in uniform, Captain Fletcher?" he asked.

"I have resigned from the service, sir."

"It is all one. I do not take kindly to soldiers. Please state your business with me." There was an icy tone

in the old giant's rumbling voice.

"Why, sir, I wish to make some investigations at Fort Kittman, and came to solicit your assistance and certain information."

"At the request of whom?"

"At the request of Colonel Powell."

The storm broke, with vivid lightning flashing from the old minister's eyes. It was sheer human wrath, and no righteous indignation about it.

"What! Dare he send an emissary to me!" he thundered. "Young man, no deeper insult could be offered me than the mentioning of that man's name in my presence! It is an insult to any decent man to breathe the same air with him."

"Colonel Powell is dead, sir," said Fletcher, gravely.

"God forgive me for speaking disrespectfully of the dead, but my provocation has been great, Captain Fletcher, as you perhaps know.

At the loud tones of Erskine, the young woman came to the door. Seeing her, "It is nothing, daughter," he said.

She returned to her household duties, and Erskine turned again to Fletcher.

"What is it, exactly, that you wish me to do?" he demanded.

Fletcher began telling of Powell's dying message.

"Speak a little lower, please," said Erskine. "I'd do murder with my bare hands on the man that told her she is not my daughter."

The old man's voice vibrated with the intensity of his emotion. Fletcher dropped his voice and went on with the recital of his story.

"Captain Fletcher, forgive me if in my agony of mind I have spoken harshly to you," Erskine said, at the conclusion. "I can readily understand that you have undertaken this mission with the purest of motives. But, sir, there are some wrongs that cannot be righted, some crimes that cannot be expiated, some sins that cannot be pardoned. Powell's actions were all of these."

"I can appreciate your feeling in the matter, Mr. Erskine. I assure you that I didn't know until today the extent of the injury Colonel Powell had done you. When I learned it, I should have turned back, but something impelled me to come on. I had hopes that I might at least right a part of that great wrong, as Powell assured me I could do, with your assistance."

"What assistance do you require?"

"That you go with me to the old fort to make certain investigations that——"

"No! Not for twenty-six years have I set foot on that accursed place. It is more doubly accursed than Sodom and Gomorrah. I shall never go there, under any circumstances."

Fletcher talked on in low, pleading tones, but the old preacher was obdurate. The young woman came to the door from time to time and cast a questioning glance at the two men.

"Let me think over this matter until morning, Captain Fletcher," Mr. Erskine said at last, as Fletcher rose to leave. "This has come with a great shock to me. Your kindness and sympathy have moved me deeply. Be my guest for the night, and in the morning I'll give you my decision."

"I regret that I shall not be able to accept your kind entertainment, Mr. Erskine, but I have another engagement. I shall return, however, very early in the morning," Fletcher promised, and with a hearty handclasp he turned away.

As he mounted his horse, Fletcher glanced toward the house, in the hope of again seeing the young woman, but she was not to be seen. He was thinking as he rode away down the trail that he would see her again in the morning. Would he? No man can see beyond the veil of night that falls to mark the end of one eventful day. Beyond it is another day, and another set of mysteries.

It was mid-afternoon when Fletcher again reached the forks of the trail and stopped to listen for the call of the turkey. Timidly it came, once, twice, and thrice. Fletcher smiled at this vagary of the old hunter who was apparently, in memory, again among the wild scenes, and wilder men, of his youth. He whistled a bar of "Dixie," soft and low. As the last note died on his lips, he looked down and saw Bill Sandridge standing in ten feet of him. Not a branch had stirred, not a sound had he heard.

"Just wanted to see if I could still do that," grinned Bill, as he led the way into the dense jungle of timber.

FLETCHER had been gone from the Erskine cabin about an hour. The old minister sat long under the trees, in a profound study. The young woman came to the door and looked at him. He was leaning back in the great rustic arm chair that he had built to sustain

his ponderous form. She supposed he was taking an afternoon nap in his chair, as he often did.

A buggy drove up to the gate. A woman sprang lightly to the ground and tied the horses. She entered the gate and, seeing the old man in his chair, called to him. Erskine roused up, saw the visitor, and rose quickly.

"You almost caught me napping, Mrs. Junay," he exclaimed. "Glad to see you looking so fine. Come in."

"I have but a moment to stay, Mr. Erskine," Sarena Junay answered. "I came to see if you wouldn't let Lola go and stay all night with me. I get so lonesome sometimes I nearly go mad."

Ordinarily, Mr. Erskine was very much averse to Lola visiting Mrs. Junay. Now it met with his entire approval. He had that on his mind which would be hard to conceal from the girl's shrewd eyes. Often he had thought that he ought to tell her the story of her mother, but as often he had flinched from the ordeal as from some poisonous thing. He had finally decided that she should never know. For only two years of her life had Lola been away from him. That was when he sent her to a seminary from the time she was twelve until she was fourteen. There she learned the things that he couldn't teach her. After that he had educated her himself.

"Why, if it will afford you and Lola pleasure, I think she should go," he agreed. "I'll be all right here by myself. You'll bring her back early tomorrow?"

Mr. Erskine controled his voice, but for once in his life he was anxious for Lola to spend a night at the home of this thoughtless, flighty woman, who seemed to him no worse than many others he had known. At any rate, he was not afraid that any associates would contaminate the character of this matchless girl, whose habits of thought he had formed.

"Yes, indeed. Just as early in the morning as she wants to come," replied Mrs. Junay.

Lola was naturally delighted at the thought of a visit. It was a pleasure to get away from the household duties occasionally, much as she loved Mr. Erskine and delighted in making him comfortable.

So, it was arranged, and a little while later Lola and Sarena left together in the buggy.

They had almost reached the Junay home, and Sarena had chattered the whole way, about all manner of things.

"Oh, I forgot to tell Mr. Erskine something that I should have told him," she said suddenly. "Mr. LaFlore is dead."

"Mr. LaFlore! Dead!" cried Lola.

"Yes. He started to Tishomingo this morning early, and someone killed him on Little Willow Creek. Just where the road crosses."

"Why, it's strange that they have not sent us word. Mrs. LaFlore will be sure to want father to conduct the funeral. Are you sure the report is true?"

"Oh, yes. There is no doubt of it. I don't suppose they have hardly thought of the funeral. Everyone is out looking for the man who killed him. The man on the big brown horse."

"What man?" Lola asked.

"Nobody seems to know. A man stayed at LaFlore's last night. Mrs. LaFlore didn't know him. He was a Captain somebody. This morning he tied his horse by the side of Mr. LaFlore's team and rode away from the house with him in the buggy."

Lola was rapidly going over the events of the day at the cabin. The big brown horse had not escaped her eyes. Also, she had overheard Mr. Erskine call his visitor "captain." But that man was not a murderer. He had a letter from Mr. LaFlore to Erskine. Still——

"I think I should go back home at once, Sarena," said Lola.

"Oh, no! You couldn't do Mr. LaFlore any good. If you told Mr. Erskine, he would only worry that much more. Keep it from him until morning. I know Mr. LaFlore was your friend, but it is not as if you were going to a party, or something. You'll just spend the night quietly with me, and in the morning I'll take you home. The sun is almost down now, and I'd be afraid to drive back there."

By this time they were driving along the bank of the big pool, which extended a mile above the Cottonwood ranch-house. Lola at last agreed that it might be best for her to spend the night at the Cottonwood and return home early in the morning, but the death of LaFlore had robbed the visit of its pleasure.

MEANTIME, Fletcher and his guide whiled away the afternoon in their leafy retreat, safe from prying eyes. Bill Sandridge talked, but said nothing. The man seemed to live each day separately and not as an integral part of a

fetime. His life was but a series of incidents, like a story without a plot.

Captain Fletcher had employed Bill as a guide. Very well, let Captain Fletcher say where he wanted to be guided to, and the work should be done. Bill would, as he said, be glad to earn a little tobacco money.

Fletcher was thinking these things as he watched Bill prepare the evening meal. What was really in the old scout's mind was another matter, as were also those narrowed lids through which he regarded his employer when Fletcher's back was turned.

As they sat smoking, after supper, Fletcher broke an unusually long silence on Bill's part, by asking, "Bill, was there anyone else besides those you mentioned that were tangled up in that mess at the old fort?"

"Nary a one that I ever knowed of. I reck'n most of 'em's dead. Did you find the old parson?"

"Yes, and he's very much alive; he looks far from helpless. He must have been a powerful man in his prime."

"That's just about what you'd call him, I reck'n. When I first knowed him, there was no two men at the fo't that could handle him. He was big, powerfully strong, and active as a cat. Besides that, he was the best shot in the country. Fellows used to say that, if he wasn't a preacher, he'd be a plumb dangerous bad man. He had the nerve of Old Harry himself and didn't know how to be afraid. I allers 'lowed being a preacher wouldn't make much difference, if he got real mad. I know Powell was as feared of him as he was of the devil."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Well, I ain't never been accused of being afeared much, but sometimes I been right cautious. I wouldn't want to start nothin' with old Parson Erskine when he thought he was right and I was wrong."

"We're going to see him in the morning," Fletcher said. "He thinks he's right, and I'm wrong. Are you willing to go?"

"Sho' now! You got me employed, and I reck'n you got a right to pick the work for me. Don't seem like one man, around a hundred year old, ought to look like a bad varmint to you and me both."

That ended the conversation. Fletcher had told nothing about his visit to the cabin, and Sandridge had asked no questions. Bill had cut boughs from a cedar on the side of the bluff, and made their beds by spreading blankets over the boughs.

The droning of a rapid in the Ashumbala came to them as they lay on their cedar scented beds under the shelving bluff. Old Bill apparently slept the sleep of the just, but with Fletcher it was different. For hours he lay staring into the darkness, and listening to the ticking night-sounds. He was in the environs of the old fort. If he had believed in the activities of disembodied spirits he would have felt that this was a propitious moment for a visitation.

Throughout all his puzzlement over the complex problem with which he was confronted, a vision of Lola Erskine, advancing and fading, like a fade-out in a picture play, was constantly before his vision. When the picture became dim, he told himself that he was on a fool's errand and would ride for Red River in the morning. He would cross back on Shadrach's boat, and go on about his business. Then the vision would advance out of the darkness with startling clearness. On the face would be a pleading look, and Fletcher would brush his hand across his eyes. At long last he fell asleep, knowing that the die was cast and that he'd never turn back until the mystery of Fort Kittman was solved.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUSINESS OF JIM CORBY

WHILE Fletcher was turning on his bed of cedar boughs, there was activity in another quarter. Out in the little glade near the Cottonwood, Jim Corby again squatted like a human vulture. Near him squatted Junay, his rat eyes glistening, round and beady.

"Well," snapped Corby, "has my business been attended to?"

"I heard down at the store this evening that LaFlore's buggy team came home about ten o'clock this morning with nothing on but the collars and hames. Mrs. LaFlore sent a man to hunt for her husband. The man found his body by the side of the road, at the crossing of Little Willow. A party of LaFlore's friends are out hunting for the killer," Junay narrated.

"Who killed him?"

"Why, the report is that a man on a big brown horse, Captain somebody, stayed at the LaFlore's house last night. He tied his horse by the side of LaFlore's team and left in the buggy with the senator this morning. He hasn't been seen since, and I suppose——"

"A very fortunate circumstance, but you are not answering my question. Who killed LaFlore?" There was a cold, grating note in Corby's question.

"What difference does it make? You wanted positive assurance that LaFlore is dead. I can give it, and——"

"Everything makes a difference to me, just now. Who killed LaFlore?" There was positive menace in the question this time, and Junay flinched.

"Henry Walford, and he jumps every time his name is called since then."

"Now you can trust him, and he'll do anything you tell him to do," Corby approved. LaFlore's death is only one of the things that I told you to report. What about the other?"

"Lola Erskine is at my house, and will spend the night there."

"Good enough. I don't know the girl but I've seen her. If things fall out as they should, I may marry her myself. Now you and I are going to get busy. Where is your horse?"

"Tied in that thicket."

"Get him, and let's ride from here."

"Where are we going?" Junay asked hesitantly.

"You are going with me; and I know where I want to go. I'll——"

"See here, Corby, you're coming it entirely too damned strong," Junay objected. "I'll admit that I'm under obligations to you, but——"

"Obligations? I never claimed that you owed me anything," said Corby, curtly. "Let's get this thing straight. I'll tell you frankly that if you had made a stand like any sort of a man, last night when I was bluffing, you'd have had a chance to win. That is, nothing more serious would have happened to you than getting killed. You didn't call my bluff, but practically admitted that you killed old Theobalt at his mansion on Bayou La Touche. On top of that, you have instigated the murder of LaFlore, and I know other things. Let's you and me have an understanding before we go any further. You can take your choice: go on and help me with my business, doing what I tell you to do, or—take your chance with the law. If you say one word more, it's all off between you and me. I can get along without you. Can you get along without me, and with my knowledge in the hands of the first officer I meet?"

"You've got me to rights, damn you!" whimpered Junay. "Let's go." He walked off toward where his horse was hidden in a thicket.

Corby bared his long, yellow teeth in the grin of a saturnine beast. It was plain that Junay would take the lead, wherever they went. It was also quite clear that one little false move on the part or Mr. Junay would be his last move of any sort.

EARLY to bed and early to rise," had been the rule of Mr. Erskine's life, but on this particular night he was violating it. There was that on his mind which would not permit sleep. The spring weather was pleasant enough in the daytime, but the nights were still chilly, especially for an old man whose blood moved slowly. So, making a fire in the wide fireplace, he sat down in a big armchair to ponder over the situation.

In memory he lived again the agony of his daughter's tragedy, the two bitter years of hate and longing to do murder that followed. After that the long years of nagging pain, and the lie that he had lived toward his grand-daughter. His hatred for Powell he didn't consider even sinful. To him it was righteous wrath. The lie he had lived toward the girl he considered pardonable on account of its purpose.

What could come of Captain Fletcher's investigation? The wrong had been committed and had borne its evil fruit. How could anything that might be brought to light at this late day change matters? Still, Fletcher was a serious-minded, sincere gentleman, from all appearances. At last the old minister reached a conclusion. The old fort was now but a heap of broken stones and falling walls. It would be heathenish to believe that God would let an evil spirit dwell there, to the hurt of His servants. Yes, he would go with Captain Fletcher in the morning.

Having reached this conclusion, his mind was more at rest. He would smoke one more pipe, and then go to bed. So, filling his pipe, he stretched his mighty legs before the blaze and, leaning back in his chair, summoned to his mind every lineament of this young captain who had been so strangely thrown into the current of his life when it was almost ready to flow over the last cataract and disappear in the oblivion of death.

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Erskine sprang up quite nimbly for a man of his years. He had no near neighbors. That would be Captain Fletcher, returning after all to accept his invitation for

the night. His company would be a pleasant break to the painful monotony of Erskine's thoughts. He threw open the cabin door and saw in the light from his lamp the flat, sallow face, and parrot nose of Jim Corby!

"Come in, sir," invited Mr. Erskine, supposing this man to be some traveler who had lost his way.

Corby entered the cabin and took a proffered chair by the fire.

"The evenings are still quite cool," commented Mr. Erskine, as the stranger leaned forward and warmed his hands at the blaze.

"Yes, we have spring and winter mixed, like an old man with a young wife," returned Corby, glibly. "I don't suppose you remember me, Mr. Erskine. I was just a young fellow when I last saw you."

"N-no. There is something familiar about your face, some likeness to a man I have known, but I can't recall it now. Seems that my memory is not what it used to be."

"You remember George Cantrell, who was sutler at Fort Kitt?"

The old man's face froze into a rigid mask. His brows set like adamant. "Yes, I knew him. What of it?"

"He had a son, Jack Cantrell, who was a private soldier at the post. You may never have noticed him, being a private."

There was a sneer in Corby's tone, and Erskine caught it. Out of the dead past rose cruel phantoms. Again, on the same day, he was reminded of those bitter years.

"I have been known in this country as Jim Corby, but it happens that I am that son, and my real name is Jack Cantrell."

"Why the assumed name?" There was a touch of iron in the old minister's question.

"Because it suited my purpose. I have had business in this country that Jim Corby could attend to, while Jack Cantrell would have been handicapped."

"How long have you been back here?" Erskine asked.

"Nearly twenty years."

"Strange that I have never seen you before."

"No. You don't go about much, and I have been rather particular that you didn't see me. Now that I am ready to carry out my plans, it suits my purpose for you to know who I am. I need your help."

"In what way?"

Again, on the same day, had come a man asking his assistance in some mysterious matter. Mr. Erskine took a firm grip on his emotions, determined that he would not be betrayed into saying anything that he might later regret.

Casting a glance toward the door, to make sure that Junay was not in hearing, Corby, or Cantrell, talked rapidly in a low tone. Out there in the dark the rat-eyes were peering in at the cabin door, which stood open. Junay could not catch a word, listen as he might. He didn't know what his part of the enterprise was, except that he was to obey Corby.

At last Corby raised his voice again and, creeping a little closer, Junay heard him quite plainly: "Come, Mr. Erskine, you are too shrewd to fail to see your position. I'm entitled to this information, and you are going to give it to me."

"I tell you I know nothing about the matter," the minister denied.

"And I tell you, that you are bound to know. That you ought to see that it is your duty to tell me."

"By what authority do you make such a demand of me?" There was dignity in the old man's question.

"By authority of the power to do as I please in the premises. There is no law in this country, between two white men. I am going to know, and you can save time and trouble by telling me." Corby's voice was hard and grim.

If there was anything like fright in Mr. Erskine's mind, his steady voice didn't show it.

"It seems to me, Mr. Cantrell, if you have known this all these years, you are rather late in seeking me out. You say you have been back in this country for years. Why have you not made the request sooner?"

"Because I was never before in a position to enforce my demand on you, and I knew no one else could tell me." Now an evil light glinted in Corby's eyes.

"I know nothing of any power you may have to enforce your demand, but I can tell you that I know nothing of what you seek. I have not set foot in the neighborhood of the old fort in twenty-six years, and——"

"Come, come, Parson. There is no use for two men like you and me to quibble over a plain matter of business. I know that Powell was more afraid of you than he was of the devil, and that he would never come back here. Still, he was a human, and he'd naturally let you know."

"Why naturally?"

"Because he'd want his daughter to——"

Erskine's face worked with emotion, as

he realized that this man, too, knew of his daughter's disgrace. Drawing himself up with dignity, and controling his voice by a mighty effort, he interrupted his visitor.

"If you please, Mr. Cantrell, leave the private affairs of my family out of this discussion," he said.

"That rests with you, sir," Corby answered. "Tell me what I want to know, and I'll soon forget you and your family."

"I tell you, again, that I know nothing about what you ask."

"And I tell you that I don't believe a word of what you say, and I'll find a way to make you tell."

"I'm not accustomed to talking when I don't want to talk, and certainly I shall not tell you something that I don't know," said Erskine decisively.

"I'll make you talk, fast enough. You've kept the story of your daughter's life very quiet. You've told people that Lola was your daughter. Anybody that ever saw Major Powell, would know——"

"I told you to keep my family affairs out of this!" There was the menacing note of distant thunder in Erskine's voice.

"Yes, and I told you I'd make you talk. Tell me now, or the whole world shall know that Lola is Major Powell's and your daughter's——"

The sentence was never finished. With the roar of an enraged lion, Erskine sprang from his chair. He was very old, but he was a giant, and there was still a good fight in him, provided it was a short one. It was his purpose to make it short. His great hands reached for Cantrell, to tear him apart. There was a single shot, a crashing fall that shook the cabin, then stillness.

"Come here, Junay," called Corby, after a few moments.

The cringing, quivering little wretch approached the door and peered in.

"Come on in here, damn you!"

Quakingly, Junay approached the body, which lay on the floor with feet on the hearth. Corby was standing near the dead man's head, and on his face was a look that bordered on demoniac rage, but his voice was quiet when he spoke.

"Mr. Erskine has made a serious mistake," he said.

"Looks to me that you've made one," faltered Junay. "He can't tell you anything, now."

"No, but I'm still alive. I wouldn't have been if he'd got his hands on me. I've seen him break a wagon single-tree over his knee, like it was a pipestem."

"Anyway, you lose," Junay argued.

"No, I think not. I don't like to have any sort of business with a woman. They are too uncertain. In this case, I'll have to. Lola knows, and she'll have to tell me."

"If I had killed this old man, the way you have, I'd not stay in this country long enough to find out anything."

"Oh, you don't understand my methods. Give me your gun."

Quaking with fear, Junay drew his revolver and passed it over. Corby took it, and deliberately fired a shot into the fireplace. Then he threw the weapon on the floor by the side of Erskine. Its one empty cartridge would tell the tale, and Junay's initials were on the handle.

"Let's go," he said, then, turning toward the door.

"Gimme back my gun!" screamed Junay, in panic fright.

"If you don't get out of here and onto your horse as quick as you know how, you won't need a gun any more," Corby threatened.

Thus, leading the way, unarmed, and menaced by the most fiendish cold killer that he had ever seen, the little French renegade took the way back down the trail toward the Cottonwood. They had blown out the lamp in the Erskine cabin, and darkness was over the gruesome scene.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOOING OF LOUIS PANOLA

SARENA JUNAY was not a good woman. It might be said that she was more a thoughtless, irresponsible woman than a really wicked one. True, she had incited Walford to cold murder, but in that she had acted according to her lights. In her veins ran bad Indian blood and bad white blood. She was but running true to form. She looked upon the death of Charles LaFlore as a duty to her dead father, whom LaFlore had shot.

Morally, she was the product of circumstance and environment. She had been literally sold for a price, and, knowing it, she had shaped her life accordingly. When opportunity offered for her to snatch a moment of what she foolishly thought was happiness, she didn't hesitate to pluck the flower, regardless of its thorns.

In addition to the idea of filial duty, in

.e killing of LaFlore, the unchecked, unbridled desire to rule the actions of a man had actuated her. For the time, at least, she loved Walford with an insane passion. He had told her that he loved her, but if his love was great enough to cause him to do her bidding, even to the taking of human life, she would feel sure of him for all time.

Walford, considering himself an outlaw, had committed murder at the request of a woman. He, too, thought this service would bind Sarena to him for the future. They were two wicked fools, though not the first, nor yet the last perhaps, who had sacrificed all to their passions. Sowing the wind, to reap the whirlwind in a few short days, or weeks.

Mrs. Junay came as near to loving her brother as she could come at all to the grand passion. The maternal instinct that lies dormant in every woman she had lavished on Louis. By inducing Lola to spend the night at Cottonwood, she would make Louis happy. She knew nothing, cared nothing, about why Junay had suggested it. She knew Louis loved Lola madly but had paid court to her with the timidity of a bashful, diffident boy. In fact, never a word of love had he spoken to her.

Only so much of his passion as could be expressed in the tones of his wonderful violin and the glances of his dark eyes had ever found utterance. Sarena wanted to see her brother happy in his love. It never for a moment occurred to her that Lola might not reciprocate. He was handsome, according to Sarena's standards of masculine beauty. He was educated, polished in manner, and a wonderful musician. If it had occurred to her to make comparisons, she would have felt that Louis was at least making great concessions, if not actually stooping, to love this girl.

Night came. None but Sarena knew that Junay was going away. Only the two couples were left in the house. Sarena was at the piano, and Louis sat near with his violin. Henry Walford stood moodily in the doorway, casting an occasional glance over his shoulder. Lola occupied a couch at one side of the room. Her mind was distracted from the really wonderful music by disturbing thoughts. The death of Mr. LaFlore was a decided shock to her. Not so much that the old chief was her own friend, but on account of the grief that must come to Mr. Erskine when he heard it. Marching in and out through the maze of her thoughts, was the stalwart form of Captain Fletcher, the man on the big brown horse. She had looked into those deep blue eyes. Had seen the dancing imps of mischief in them at some pleasantry, and the somber shades of seriousness as the conversation turned on graver matters. If that man was a murderer, there was no hope that any honest people were left in the world. She put the thought from her, but it would intrude itself.

In her abstraction she barely noticed Walford, as he walked out onto the gallery. A moment later, Mrs. Junay excused herself and left the room. The change made no difference to Louis Panola. With his glistening eyes fixed on Lola, in a rapt expression of worship, he went on making his violin say what was in his heart.

Sarena passed through the hall with a light step and joined Walford on the gallery. Together they walked down the broad steps, and on toward the boat landing.

"Louis frets me," murmured Sarena. "He's crazy about Lola and hasn't the courage to tell her so."

"He'll tell her now," Walford answered significantly. "He's got the courage tonight. I saw him take it."

IN THE parlor Louis played on for a while, then, rising, laid his violin on the piano, and without a word walked over and sat down on the couch by the side of Lola.

"That was wonderful music, Louis," said she. "You should be very proud of your talent."

"Oh, my talent is nothing great. There is just one thing in the world that I could ever be proud of, and I want to talk to you about that."

"Yes? What is that wonderful thing?"

"You!"

It came with an unpleasant shock and caught the girl unawares. Even at the instant he spoke, she was thinking of the man on the big brown horse.

"Why—why, Louis, I—I don't understand what you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I mean. No man ever has or ever can love a woman as I love you. A thousand times I've wanted to tell you, but hadn't the courage. Now, I'm going to tell you all."

In smooth, polished sentences, that lacked nothing, and with the humbleness of a pleading slave, Panola sincerely poured

out his heart to the woman he loved.

"Why, Louis, you astonish me! I never even thought of such a thing. Why—I—surely, I have never, by word or act, encouraged you."

"No! That is the maddening part of it all. That a woman of your keen intelligence could fail to see that I worshipped her. Could look at me with the impersonal glance that she would bestow on a piece of furniture. But you will love me, now that I have told you, won't you, Lola?" he pleaded.

"I know little of love, Louis," and the girl's voice was as gentle as that of a sister, "but I'm sure that it doesn't come that way. We cannot love where we will, but where we must. I——"

"But you must love me," Panola interrupted impetuously. "You'll learn to love me. I'll be whatever you wish me to be. I'll be your slave. Think what it will mean to you. I'll take you out of the hut where you live and give you a wonderful home. You'll never have to do any more work. You'll——"

"But, Louis, that can never be. Even if I loved you, I couldn't leave my poor old father. He has been everything to me, and——"

"You wouldn't need to leave him. Take him with you."

Lola stammered for words to reply and glanced helplessly toward the door. Mistaking her confusion for yielding, Louis picked up her hand. In her abstraction she made no move to withdraw it. It was as cold and unresponsive in his burning clasp as a piece of marble. He slipped his arm around her, and she saw that in his eyes which no sane woman ever failed to understand—the battle between human love and brute passion. It was the danger signal which must not be ignored.

Lola sprang from his clasping arm and ran through the door to the gallery. She expected to find Sarena and Walford there, but they were not in sight. Louis had made no move to follow her. He, too, thought his sister and Walford were on the gallery, else he would have been by Lola's side.

Hearing Sarena laugh, Lola looked toward the river. Through an opening in the trees, she saw them in a boat, far over toward the opposite bank. What could Sarena mean? She, a married woman, out there on the river at night, with Walford. Suddenly, Lola sensed the awful truth, and, turning with panic fright, she entered the hall door and fled up the stairs. In her room, she turned the key in the lock.

Lola was trembling with fear. She sank down in a chair by the open window and tried to collect her thoughts. The silence of midnight was over the place. At every tiny noise Lola would start violently, and wonder afresh when would Sarena come in. And where was Mr. Junay?

Louis Panola sat for some time as if in a trance, after he heard Lola run up the stairs and close her door behind her. She had escaped him, but she was still in the house. Perhaps she only wanted time to think over his sudden proposal.

After a while, Louis rose and went to a room at the back of the house, on the ground floor. Walford said he had seen Louis take the courage that made him bold enough to tell Lola of his love. That courage was dying out, and he must take some more. Grasping the bottle, he drank in long gulps, as if it were water. Then, throwing the bottle on a bed, he returned to the parlor.

There he sat, alone on the couch, seemingly unable to realize that Lola was gone. From time to time he drew a revolver from his pocket. The glittering weapon seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him. He was in that state of mild madness when men, thwarted in their desires, take their own lives. It would not have been strange had the temperamental Panola destroyed himself, and it might have been the better ending for a profitless life. But, after each examination, he dropped the weapon back into his pocket.

The man's eyes were now glassy, and his hands shook. His olive hued face was a pale, sickly, greenish tint, as he sat staring vacuously about the room.

AT HER window, keenly alert to every sound, Lola had heard the clock strike the hour of midnight, and then one o'clock. Then she heard footsteps on the gallery. It was not Sarena and Walford, for she could hear the clink of spurs. It must be Mr. Junay, but there was someone with him. What would Junay do when he found out that Sarena was still out on the river with Walford at this hour?

She heard voices and, leaning her head out the opened window, listened. The voices came from the parlor, which was directly below her room, and which also had an open window.

"Where's Sarena?" asked Junay.

"Out on the river," replied Louis, in dead, flat tones.

"What! Out on the river at this time of the night?"

"Ho, ho! The cat's away," came Corby's voice, with a grating, metallic, mirthless laugh.

Junay started to leave the room, and Corby called him.

"Come back here, fool! Do you want to walk up on a man that's looking for you and get shot to shoestrings? I need you a little longer." Then turning to Louis, who sat in a half stupor on the couch, "Where's Lola?"

"Upstairs, in her room."

"Hell she is! Go up and tell her to come down here, Alec. She knows what I want to find out."

Cringing with fear, and trying to recognize the terrible voice of Corby, Lola listened to the steps of Junay as he came up the stairs. What on earth could it mean? Could these men be so drunk that they had lost their reason? There was a knock on her door, but she kept silent. Some instinct told her that her only hope of safety was in that room.

Junay called, but she made no reply, and presently she heard him go back down the stair.

"Well?" demanded Corby.

"She don't answer. Asleep, I reck'n."

"Why didn't you go in and wake her?"

Lola shuddered at the suggestion, and Junay answered that the door was locked.

"Locked!" sneered Corby. "Why, you poor little runt. What if it was locked. Couldn't you break it in?"

"I might, but——"

"Oh, the lady's a guest under your roof, and it wouldn't be quite proper. Now, see here, Alec. She knows what I want to find out, and she's going to tell it. I have no such timid feelings about intruding on the privacy of old Erskine's grand-daughter."

Corby then went on to express his contempt. It was the first intimation that Lola had ever had that Mr. Erskine was not her own father, and it came in unmistakable terms. When she grasped the brute's meaning she almost fainted.

"No, you can't go up there," came the dead voice of Louis Panola, and though she loathed the young man, still Lola blessed him for that spark of decency.

"Can't go! Why not?" Corby demanded.

"Because I won't let you."

"Ho, ho! Ha, ha! That's your idea of a joke, I reck'n." Corby laughed immoderately.

Years of evil planning for this hour, days and nights of scheming to get Junay in his power, to dispose of LaFlore, who was Mr. Erskine's one remaining intimate friend, had driven Jim Corby almost insane. He had inherited the evil nature of his father. Throughout all these years he had been cautious and cunning. It had been his purpose to extort from Mr. Erskine the thing he wanted to know and then to leave the country. His failure and the death of Erskine had made the possible knowledge that Lola might have his last resort. Like a beast robbed of its prey, the man was scarcely human.

"Out of my way, you half-breed whelp!" he snarled. "I'll kick you into the river and drown you like the pup you are."

Dashing Panola aside, Corby sprang up the stairs. He knocked on the door and called the girl's name. Lola trembled at the grating tones, but she made no move.

Corby tried the latch; then, with a frightful oath, he kicked at the door. It trembled on its hinges, but held fast. Lola was thinking that the next blow must break the lock. There was no other door leading from the room. The only way out would be to drop a sheer twenty feet to the ground. Escaping death from the fall, she would still be confronted by Panola, whom she feared almost as much as she feared Corby.

Another blow on the door, and at the same time a shot roared in the well of the stair. Corby fell with a crash and lay quite still just outside the door. He had failed to break the lock and had lost his life in the attempt.

For half an hour stillness like a tomb was over the place. Lola listened, but Corby never uttered a groan. He had fallen dead, with a bullet through his heart. Louis Panola was a skilled gunman.

At last Lola heard voices again. They were on the gallery, but she couldn't make out what they were saying. She recognized Junay's voice, pitched high and strident. Once she heard Sarena laugh. It was more like hysteria than mirth. Then there was another shot, hurrying feet about the house, and silence again.

A few minutes later she saw a buggy drive out the gate, and turn west along the road that led to Red River. Walford, whom Junay intended to kill, had shot the little French renegade dead. The hurrying about the house had been Sarena, seek-

ing the few articles that she could carry.

Through it all, Louis had watched the tragedy through the glassy eyes of drunken stupor. When Walford and Sarena were gone, he fell limply across the couch and went to sleep. In the hallway, upstairs, lay Corby's body. On the gallery lay that of Junay, the sightless eyes staring at the portal of the house he had stolen and then disgraced. The world had suffered little loss in their passing. It was even fitting that Junay should meet death at the hand of the man of whom he had made a murderer.

Crouching at her window, and wondering what was below, in the great silence, Lola saw the dawn come, and later give place to the warmer tints of sunrise.

There was no movement about the house. She rose from her chair, and took a step toward the door. Then the weakness of fright overcame her, and she sank down again to wait for she knew not what.

Escape would have been easy just after Walford and Sarena left. There was no one left alive in the house but she and Panola, and he was helpless. Even now she might have escaped without arousing him, but she hesitated and was lost.

CHAPTER VIII

BILL SANDRIDGE TAKES THE TRAIL

WHILE Lola was watching the dawn brighten into the rosy tints of morning, Captain Fletcher and Bill Sandridge were preparing for their early morning visit to Mr. Erskine. As Bill swung his broad, squat body into the saddle on Lazy Ned, Tarrapin came cantering from the nearby glade.

"You forgot to tie Tarrapin up," said Fletcher.

"No, I didn't forget. It just can't be did. These braunks is podners. Tie one of 'em up, and he'd break his neck or follow. I just let Tarrapin mosey along. I never hunt on horseback."

Fletcher soon discovered that Lazy Ned was only a name. The round-barreled, long-bodied dun set forward at a peculiar fox-trot, and set the pace for their going.

The sun was just rising when they reached the cabin. The door stood open; there was no one in sight, and no smoke came from the chimney to indicate preparation of a morning meal.

"Mebbe we been onpolite in callin' so yerley," suggested Bill.

"Why, no," said Fletcher. "I should expect Mr. Erskine to be a very early riser. It seems strange that there is no one about."

Reaching in, he knocked on the door, which stood open at an angle.

There was no response, and repeated knocking failed to rouse anyone. They stepped to the corner of the house and looked around. No one could be seen. A horse in the lot looked over the fence and whinneyed for his breakfast.

They had returned to the door, and Fletcher was about to knock again, when Bill said, "Beg yo' pardon, Cap'n Jo, but I smell blood."

"You smell blood! Why——"

"Sho' now! Can't you smell it. You been a soldier on battlefields. Sho'ly you know the smell of blood."

Bill stepped through the doorway, and looked around the room. There on the floor lay the body of the old missionary, with a blue hole in the marble-like forehead.

"There's yo' blood," said he, pointing to a little pool on the floor.

"My God!" cried Fletcher, starting from the stupor of amazement into which the scene had thrown him. "Where can the young lady be?"

"Sho' now! Y'all didn't mention no young lady to me. War they one here?"

"Certainly. Mr. Erskine's—daughter."

"Well, she seems to be gone some, now. Let's look around a bit. Mebbe we can find her, too."

Fletcher shivered at the matter-of-fact tone of Bill's remark. It sounded as if he had just fired a couple of shots, had seen two birds fall and, having found one, was beating the brush for the other. He knocked on the door connecting with the other front room and, receiving no reply, opened it. The room was in order, and plainly the abode of a woman. The kitchen was then searched. There was no trace of a disturbance of any sort.

"Looks plumb queer to me," commented Bill Sandridge. "They ain't been no rukus here. Might 'a' been a suicide, but there hangs the old gent's hawg-laig on the bed-post, where it belongs. He couldn't put it back after that happened to him. Let's read some signs."

With that they left the house and Bill began a systematic examination of the premises. In very few minutes he gave his verdict.

"This killin' was did by two men, a big

one and a little one. When it's over, they mounts and rides the trail that leads down the river. A buggy's been here, and leaves ahead of the saddle-riders. That's prob'ly the way the girl goes, and——"

Captain Fletcher had followed the investigation in silence. He understood the readings. The heavy footprints of Corby, and the lighter impression of Junay's dainty boots, the buggy tracks, with fresher tracks of shod horses on top of them. Now he interrupted the guide.

"Can you track them?" That insistent note was strong in his speech.

"Sho' now! They got right smart start of us, but then we kin ride some, too."

"Miss Erskine never left her father of her own accord," Fletcher said emphatically. "These men are abductors, as well as murderers. I'll——"

"Yes, and maybe right considerable gun-fighters. When a man takes a woman alive and totes her off, he means to keep her or fight. He generally knows what the man that comes after him'll do, and he's apt to be right rough."

"Are you afraid to follow them?" The blue eyes bored into Bill like a steel drill.

"You're the cap'n of this expedition. I'm takin' orders from you, and what you say goes."

"Come on, then," Fletcher ordered. "We're after them, and will stay on their trail until we catch them. If it comes to a fight——"

Old Bill cast a quick glance at this captain. He would doubtless fight in a battle, but would he stand hitched in a cold gun-fight, when somebody was trying to kill him individually? Bill doubted it, but the die was cast. Bill was pretty sure that he could take care of himself.

Hastily throwing a blanket over the body on the floor, they closed the cabin door and rode away down the trail. A little more than an hour's swift riding, with the tracks plain all along the trail, brought them in sight of a large white house, a mile farther downstream and on the opposite side of the Ashumbala.

"That can't be the LaFlore home," said Fletcher.

"Nope. I ain't never seen that house, but I know the country. Old Louis Panola's cabin used to stand just about there. He was an old, fighting, drunken, oncivilized devil, when I knowed him. It would be just about like him to be mixed up in a mess like this."

They had gone half a mile farther, when Bill pulled up again.

"Cap'n Jo," said he, "I ain't never heared of a troop of cavalry having any luck slippin' up on a antelope. We better tie up these braunks, and take a peep at this layout on foot."

"Good suggestion," Fletcher agreed. Dismounting, he tied his horse in the thick underbrush. Bill made his "podners" secure, and they stole down the river bank.

Opposite the great pool from the Cottonwood ranch-house was a considerable bottom. The road ran a hundred yards or more from the river, and between it and the bank was a jungle of brush, mustang grapevines, and other climbers.

Bill led the way through the labyrinth, and was surprised that Fletcher kept right at his heels and made little more noise than the old scout himself. They were almost opposite the big white house, when Bill peered through the vines and bushes, across the stream, and beckoned Fletcher to his side.

LOLA had sat in her room, listening in vain for some hopeful sound. When none came, after a long wait, she grew desperate. With courage born of a fear of even greater danger, she unlocked the door and peered out. Corby's body was far enough from the door for her to reach the stairs without touching it. He lay on his back, having rebounded from the door at the moment he was shot. In that instant, every feature of the repulsive face was photographed on Lola's brain. She had never seen the man before and had no idea who he was, but she would never forget that awful face.

Carefully, she stole down the stairs. There was no sign of life about the place. She had reached the front door, when she glanced back into the hall. There, in the door that led to the parlor, stood Louis Panola, regarding her with swollen, bloodshot eyes.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

She made no reply but, with a little, inarticulate cry that was half a sob, turned and sped down the steps, almost stumbling over the body of Junay.

"Come back here!" called Panola, in a maudlin voice, as he followed to the gallery and stood wavering on the top step.

Terror lent wings to Lola's feet. Down the path she flew, sprang into a boat, and snatched up the oars. She was midway

across the broad pool when Panola appeared on the landing.

"Come back here, or I'll shoot!" he called out, raising his revolver.

The girl in the boat paid no heed, except to bend more frantically to her oars. Two shots rang as one, and Panola sank down on the little landing.

Lola had heard what she thought was a single shot. She had seen Panola fall, and wondered if the man had taken his own life in despair at losing her. As she drove the prow of the boat onto a little scimitar-shaped bit of sandy bar, it was seized and dragged bodily out of the water. Looking up, in fear of capture, she saw two men and recognized one of them as Captain Fletcher, the man on the big brown horse.

Motioning the young woman to silence, they led her to where they had left their horses. Her disheveled appearance, the dark circles under her great hazel eyes, and the look of terror in them, told the story of her frightful experience better than words. She was not hysterical. The staunch character which old Parson Erskine had instilled into her sustained her. As yet she knew nothing of what had happened at the Erskine cabin. Fletcher supposed she knew, and marveled that she could so well sustain herself in the hour of trial.

Near the horses, they stopped in a little opening that was hidden from every direction. Fletcher had seen the girl escape from Panola and naturally supposed he was one of Mr. Erskine's murderers and Lola's abductor.

"Where is the other man?" he asked, in low, guarded tones.

"Which other man?"

"The other of the two men who took you away from your home, after they——"

"No one took me away from home."

There was blank astonishment in Fletcher's face, until Lola went on, "I went with Sarena—Mrs. Junay, to spend the night at the Cottonwood, and—oh, it was frightful. I—I can't——"

"Bear up, Miss Erskine," Fletcher comforted her. "You are safe with friends, now. How many others are in the house?"

"None alive, I think. There were only five persons there. Two were killed in the house. You killed one, and the other two went away in the night."

"Then you and this man were left alone in the house. You made a run for it, and he followed you," Fletcher reconstructed.

"Yes. I'm sure there is no one else about the place."

"That's good luck, Cap'n Jo," broke in Bill Sandridge, who was showing signs of restlessness. "We come after this young lady. We found her, and now we don't seem to have much business here. If we get away without being seen, nobody will ask any questions."

"That's a good suggestion, Bill," said Fletcher. "Miss Erskine, are you strong enough to ride a horse?"

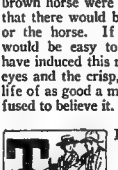
"Oh, yes! I'm just frightened." She shuddered. "It was my purpose to reach the trail and walk, or rather run, to my—to Mr. Erskine's."

"You will not need to walk," Fletcher assured her. "We have horses near here."

A few minutes later, Lola was mounted on Lazy Ned, while Bill rode Tarrapin, without either saddle or bridle. There was little conversation, as they rode swiftly up the trail, Sandridge keeping a sharp lookout on every hand. This mess at the Erskine cabin and the killing at the white house were both a part of something else, and that something must be pretty bad. Evidently, in his mind, this girl had killed the two men who lay dead at the Cottonwood. He didn't blame her. When a woman kills a man in a gun-fight, she usually has to do it. Still, Mr. Sandridge had no relish for getting mixed up in a general war among desperadoes.

To Fletcher the whole matter was an even greater puzzle. Why on earth had anyone murdered the old preacher? What was Lola doing at the home of such people as those at the Cottonwood? Scores of other questions assailed him. On top of that was the unpleasant duty of telling Lola that the old man she believed to be her father was dead.

From time to time Lola glanced back. The deep blue eyes of the man on the big brown horse were upon her. She realized that there would be no mistaking the man or the horse. If one had seen him, he would be easy to identify. What could have induced this man, with the wonderful eyes and the crisp, sandy hair, to take the life of as good a man as LaFlore. She refused to believe it. No, it couldn't be true.



THEY were within half a mile of the cabin when Fletcher called a halt. Lola wondered why they didn't go on to the house.

"How are you feeling, now, Miss Erskine?" he asked.

"Oh, I feel all right, now, but I dread going home."

"Dread going home? Why do you dread it?" Surely this girl knew what she would find at the cabin, thought Fletcher.

"Because I must tell my—Mr. Erskine something that will make him very unhappy."

All along the way, Lola had been planning to tell Fletcher of LaFlore's death, and to look squarely into his eyes and see the effect on him.

"What is that sad news?" he asked.

"Mr. Charles LaFlore, a very old, and very dear friend of his, was murdered at the——"

"LaFlore! Murdered!" cried Fletcher. "Why, that is impossible!"

"No. It is quite true. They found the body in the road at the crossing of Little Willow. Someone had shot him from ambush."

Lola was looking squarely into Fletcher's eyes, but she saw nothing there except the shock and surprise that was real. Fletcher admired the old chief greatly. Then she prepared to fire the decisive shot.

"Mrs. LaFlore said a man stayed all night at their house the night before. She didn't know his name, but Mr. LaFlore called him Captain something, which she didn't catch. He had tied his horse, a big brown, by Mr. LaFlore's team and rode away in the buggy with him that morning."

If Lola expected to see Fletcher wince, she was disappointed.

"I stayed at Mr. LaFlore's house night before last," he said, his eyes holding hers steadily. "I left there in the buggy with him yesterday morning. Five miles from his house, I left him, and took the trail that leads over the hills to Fort Kittman. I was at Bill Sandridge's camp a little while after sunrise. You don't——"

"Oh, I didn't mean——"

Silence fell between them. Bill Sandridge was not concerned with eyes, either blue or hazel. He had a hide of his own to keep bullet holes out of. He knew that Fletcher couldn't have killed LaFlore at the crossing of Little Willow and then have gotten to his camp at the time he did. Still, this didn't mend matters. In the first place, his testimony might not have much weight if it was called for. If LaFlore's friends found the man on the big brown horse, there was not likely to be a trial of any sort. Besides all this, there were several very good reasons why Sandridge didn't want to answer any questions. He was running over these in his mind, when Fletcher spoke.

"I'm sorry to tell you, but you will be spared the ordeal of telling Mr. Erskine," he said to Lola. "You will, however, have a greater trial."

"Why, Captain Fletcher, what can you mean?"

"Do you know who the two men were that went to your grandfather—to Mr. Erskine's house last night?"

Fletcher caught himself, but too late. Lola's face flushed scarlet as she remembered what Corby had called her in his rage, while talking to Junay a few minutes before Pannla shot him. With great effort she controled herself enough to speak calmly.

"One of them was Mr. Junay. The other man I didn't know. He was a tall, sharp-faced man, with a great hook nose, and long teeth. His chin was narrow and sharp. Both of them are dead."

Had Fletcher not been looking at Lola as she described Corby, he would have wondered at the expression on the face of Bill Sandridge.

"Do you know what they went there for?"

"No, sir. I overheard them talking, and understood that it was something they wanted my—Mr. Erskine to tell them. He had refused, and they were going to try to make me tell it, though I have no idea what it could be."

"Don't you know that—that——"

Lola's eyes widened in horror. "Tell me!" she cried. "Oh, tell me, quickly. They didn't——"

"Mr. Erskine is dead," said Fletcher, a world of sadness and sympathy in his voice.

The young woman gave one agonized cry, then broke down and sobbed pitifully. It seemed that she would fall from her horse, but for Fletcher taking her arm and supporting her.

He knew that no words of his would mean anything to the girl at this time. She was on the verge of hysteria from the double shock of her experience at the Cottonwood and the death of the man who was her only stay in life. There was danger in delay, unless they wanted to carry the girl to the house.

They moved forward and the going seemed a momentary distraction for Lola's grief. She controled her emotions and rode in tearful silence to the cabin. When they had dismounted, Captain Fletcher thought of that ghastly sight that must greet the young woman when she went in.

"Wait here a little, Miss Erskine, until Bill and I go in and place the body on a bed," he said.

"No, no. I want to see him, just where he fell. I shall not break down now."

As the girl knelt by the prostrate body of the man whom she had known and loved as her father, she didn't cry out in her grief, but her shoulders shook with the violent sobbing, and tears fell unrestrained. At last she rose and, removing the covers from a bed in the room, motioned them to lay the body there.

AS THEY approached to lift the heavy body, which was a task for two men, Bill looked down, and with the toe of his boot kicked a revolver from under the old minister's coat. Fletcher stooped and picked it up. He saw the initials, A. J., cut in the handle, and showed them to Lola.

"Alex Junay," she murmured. "What could have caused him to do that? They had always been friends. This mystery will drive me mad."

But the finding of the revolver had been a great relief to her. For half an hour she had been tormented with the thought that Fletcher had been with LaFlore, and he was killed. Later the same day he had been with Mr. Erskine, and now he was dead. She knew Junay and the other man had been to the house the night before, and now finding Junay's revolver on the floor made it quite plain that Fletcher was not the murderer. It didn't occur to her to wonder how the killer had come to leave his gun, but Bill Sandridge was thinking of that.

When the body was laid out and covered with a sheet, Bill got water and washed up the little spot of blood. Most of it had gone through a crack in the rough board floor. Lola bathed her tear-stained face and set about getting something for them to eat. Her grief had settled into a dull agony, expressed from time to time in great, heaving sobs. Her mind was whirling. What was this great trouble that had come to her? What was the meaning of the shootings at the Cottonwood the night before? What was it that Corby and Junay wanted to know? What could the information be, that they would do murder to secure it? Could there be truth in the things Corby had said of her mother? Why had Captain Fletcher referred to Mr. Erskine as her grandfather? What chain had sent Fletcher there at that time? Was he seeking the same thing that Corby and Junay sought?

Hordes upon hordes of questions trooped through her bewildered mind, but never an answer suggested itself. Added to the terrible hurt of her grief at Mr. Erskine's death, and the falseness of those whom she had thought her friends, was the constantly nagging misery that Corby's brutal words had set going in her mind.

Without a word of invitation, Bill had taken their horses to the stable, fed them and closed the door, not leaving even a bridle outside. Then, returning to the front of the cabin, he called Captain Fletcher outside.

"Cap'n Jo," said he, "I reck'n you been so excited over what's happened this morning that you maybe ain't thought of the pickle that you and me's in. That fellow Panola needed killin', and I ain't worrying much about that—if nobody saw us do it. On the other hand, there's such a thing as tracks. We followed some this morning. Somebody's bound to find them carcasses in that house sooner or later. They're apt to see that boat, and the trail that leads from it, and——"

"But, Lola can tell them that we didn't kill anybody except the man who was chasing her, who, as you say, needed killing the worst way," Fletcher argued.

"No, I don't reck'n she could tell 'em that. Way I understand it, she was locked up in her room when them two men was kilt, and don't know who done it. She heard the shots, but she didn't see anything. By the same way of figgerin', you and me can't say that she didn't do that shooting herself. I wouldn't wonder, and I wouldn't blame her dang bit."

"No. You are right about it, Bill. She doesn't know, unless she actually killed them herself."

"Sho' now! And then, Cap'n, they's another mighty rough, ugly horn to this here dilemmy. Somebody murdered LaFlore. You was the last one seen with him, and——"

"Why, Bill. You don't think——"

"Just a minute, Cap'n. I know you didn't kill LaFlore. You couldn't've gone to the crossing of Little Willow, and got back to my camp by the time you did. I'd take yo' word for that, anyway, but then——"

"But then, what?"

"Why, my testimony wouldn't have much weight, because I was with you and

ould want to save my own hide."

"I had been so troubled over what had happened, Bill, that I didn't think of those things."

"That's what I 'lowed. Three braunks standin' at a cabin door, in a place like this, is apt to attract right smart attention. So, I puts braunks, saddles and bridles in the stables and shuts the door."

"What are we to do?" Fletcher asked.

"That's for you to decide. My suggestion would be to bury the old parson as quick as we kin and then pray for rain. That's job enough for one day. When we've et, you better explain things to the girl and make her understand that the sooner we get Mr. Erskine put away the better for all concerned."

When the meal was finished, Bill went out to smoke his pipe and left Fletcher to perform the disagreeable task alone.

"Have you any friends that you would like to notify?" asked Fletcher, when he had explained the situation.

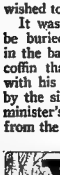
"No," said Lola. "I haven't a friend on earth."

"I hope you won't feel that way," said the young man, moved to pity by the girl's friendless condition and her grief. "Mr. Sandridge and I, in spite of the unfortunate position in which we are placed, have no thought of abandoning you."

"Oh, I don't mean to seem ungrateful," she cried. "I mean that I have no friends, such as other people have."

She hadn't bettered the expression much, but Fletcher understood the meaning she wished to convey.

It was agreed that Mr. Erskine's body be buried at once. Lola told them that in the barn loft they would find a walnut coffin that the old missionary had made with his own hands. A grave was made by the side of that in which slept the old minister's wife, in an enclosure a little way from the cabin.



HEN the last shovelful of earth had been replaced, Fletcher and Lola walked slowly toward the house. Bill Sandridge stayed behind, ostensibly to fix the fence, but as a matter of fact to remove as far as possible any indication of a new-made grave. He and the two young people knew how Mr. Erskine had died. There was no use having to answer a lot of questions about it. In a word, Mr. Sandridge was anything but easy in his mind. Two of the best men in the country had been foully murdered. His employer for the time was admittedly the man on the big brown horse, and he had a shrewd suspicion as to what would happen if Fletcher was discovered.

As Bill turned away from the little briar-grown grave yard, he glanced toward the northwest and muttered to himself, "No use to pray for rain, I reck'n. Better spend the time gettin' my camp kit out'n that bottom."

The sun was sinking into a dense bank of cloud that was riven at intervals by forked lightning. Sandridge carefully removed the new earth from the tools, and set them in the chimney corner. At the cabin door, he told Fletcher he was going to remove camp to higher ground.

"Oh, you mustn't camp out tonight," Lola interrupted quickly. "It looks like rain, and besides——"

"I 'lowed to make camp clost by. I reck'n you'd be right lonely, if somebody warn't near you," said Bill.

"Bring your camp kit here, and stay in the house, if—if you don't mind," she requested.

"The spot where a good man meets death bravely, in defense of those he loves, is hallowed ground," said Fletcher, gravely. "We shall not hesitate to occupy Mr. Erskine's room tonight. You won't mind being alone while we move the camp?"

"Never mind, Cap'n Joe," said Bill. "You just stay here with Miss Loly. I can tote that little mess of stuff in one hand." He swung away down the trail.

Fletcher stared after him, and there was an odd look, half of suspicion, half of speculation, in the blue eyes. This guide of his was becoming a problem to the young man.

"It is a wonderful thing how sorrow always finds sympathy," murmured Lola, as Bill Sandridge disappeared. "One would naturally expect kind words from you, Captain Fletcher, but your friend seems to be a man of the outdoors. Society would call him rough. Still, there has been a note of tenderest sympathy in every word he has spoken to me since—since——"

"Sympathy is an innate principle that God puts into the human heart," said Fletcher. "He who does not possess it is not justly human. As to the rough men of the great outdoors, though they are sometimes at a loss for words to express it, I have never found them lacking in that very human quality. Their hearts are usually great as their environment."

Lola turned into the house to prepare

supper. Fletcher stood in the yard, near the great elms where he and Mr. Erskine had sat, watching the gathering storm clouds.

AT THE camp in the bottom, Bill Sandridge was doing a rather remarkable thing for an ignorant hunter. Rummaging in his kit, he drew forth a battered old field-glass. The leather covering was worn from it and the brass was tarnished, but the lenses were clear. It had probably seen service many years ago, when it was valuable to be able to see into far places and to watch the maneuvers of hostile bands.

Climbing swiftly but silently up the side of the great bluff, Bill crouched behind a little cedar and placed the battered old glass to his eyes. Carefully adjusting the lenses, he swept the hills and glades beyond the stream. At last he held it steady, making a nice adjustment of the lenses, then sat long in study of some object. What he saw seemed to interest him greatly.

About four miles away, in the hills across the river, was a lovely prairie valley. Bill knew the place. There was a great spring there, and many a time he had watched there for deer and wild turkeys to come to water. What he saw now filled him with anxiety. A camp was being made near the spring. He knew the organization. It was a company of Chickasaw militia. Their only function was to drive out trespassers on the reservation, to remove cattle that had been driven in, and otherwise to protect their domain. But LaFlore was a senator, and Bill knew what that company was looking for. They were searching those hills for the man on the big brown horse. They had no authority to arrest a white man, but just now they would ask for no authority, nor were they likely to make an arrest. Here and there among the horsemen, as they rode into the camp, was one wearing a blue uniform. Bill knew these for Indian police. They had authority from the Federal Government to perform the same functions as a United States marshal.

Then, as he watched, he saw a wagon, drawn by four mules, swing into place a little way from the other camp. There was no mistaking that long body and the bows projecting front and rear. It was the outfit of a posse of Uncle Sam's own marshals. There wouldn't be a place that a rat could hide that wouldn't be explored before another day rolled around. They would find the man on the big brown horse, and with him they would find Bill. True, he might slip out his ponies and get away, but he had a reason for wanting to stay with this stranger at least a little longer.

Folding the glass, he returned to the camp and rolled up his kit. Throwing it to his shoulder as if it were a feather, he took his way cautiously back to the cabin, straight through the woods, and without halting at the trail crossings except to peer out for a possible passer.

Bill threw his camp kit in a corner of the cabin. Wood was brought, the horses fed, and all made ready for night. There was a smothering tenseness in the atmosphere, and Bill Sandridge breathed a sigh of relief when the first drops of rain began to fall. The downpour would prevent those riders from crossing the river before morning.

Lola had removed the bed on which the body had lain and had made the room ready for her guests. A fire had been made in the old fireplace, partly because the air was growing chilly and partly to drive away the gloom. The three of them gathered around the fire after supper.

"Cap'n Jo, I reck'n we'd orto have some kind of understanding about what we're goin' to do," said Bill, who had been silent for some time. "I wouldn't mention this in front of Miss Loly, but, the way I figger it, she's interested about as much as you and me. All of us is in right smart danger."

"What kind of danger?" Fletcher asked.

"Well, I'll just state the case, and you can say what kind and how much. LaFlore is dead. He was big medicine with these Injuns. You was the last man seen with him. I know you didn't kill him, but they don't. Then yesterday you comes here to see Mr. Erskine, one of the best men that's ever been in this country, and everybody that knowed him said so. Last night he gets kilt. I know you didn't kill him, because I was with you, but they don't know it, and we can't produce the man that did kill him. That's yo' part in the mess.

"Down to the Cottonwood, last night, something pretty bad happened. There's some carcasses there that's more'n apt to be found. Two people gets away from there, which is unfortunate. They might 'a' done some of the killin', but they'll have sense enough to tell a terrible tale of the desperator on the brown hawss that's do-

vastatin' the country. I wouldn't wonder that Mr. Walford is helping to hunt the desperator right now, and also the young woman that is knowed to be with him. Nobody but Miss Loly knows that she didn't kill them two men and run the other fellow and the woman off the place. That's her part in the mix-up.

"Then, they's a dead half-breed layin' on a boat landin', a boat drawed up on the bank, and some right plain tracks around it that, if rightly followed, would lead to this cabin. Here is us three in the cabin. If anybody comes and asks us where Parson Erskine is, what are we going to say? Tell the truth, of course, but who's going to believe it? I don't know's Injuns is any bigger fools than whites is when a whole flock of good men gets kilt and they's a plumb suspicious character or two in sight. I take it they are just about as bad, and maybe a little worse. That's all our part in the situation, and all of us has got to get out of it together."

"You paint a rather dark picture, Bill," Fletcher remarked.

"Well, Cap'n, they ain't no use in a feller just naturally tryin' to fool hisself. I'm talkin' right smart, and it ain't what you'd call pretty talk, but I'm most through. About fo' mile the other side of the Ashumbala River there's a camp. In it is Injun militia, Injun police, and United States marshals. Besides that, there's a lot of these reckless devils that runs cattle in this country. And so if something mighty big don't happen, a ground-squirrel couldn't hide in these roughs tomorrow."

As Bill finished speaking, the storm broke in earnest. The wind tore at the corners of the cabin, and rain fell in sheets and torrents. Lola rose, and bade them good night.

"Don't let Bill's dark picture trouble you too much, Miss Erskine," said Fletcher, as he stood before the old fireplace.

"Oh, I have no fear for myself, but I know these people, and I do fear for you and Mr. Sandridge. As for me, it could make little difference what happened to me now." With this despondent admission she passed into her own room.

Old Bill unrolled his blankets and made his pallet on the floor. Mr. Erskine's bed might be all right for the captain, but the scout's own blankets suited him best. He went to bed, and was soon snoring. For him, that day was finished. Its tragedies and heart aches were of the past. He would rebuild his tissues with sleep, to sustain him in what the morrow might bring.

Fletcher sat before the fire. There would be little sleep for him that night. The storm roared on in its fury. Rain fell in torrents; lightning flashed, and thunder shook the very earth. Drops came down the chimney and sputtered in the fire, but Fletcher was paying no attention to the elements.

What mysterious force had driven him there? In what way had Fate, or Chance, or Providence, so interlaced his life with these strange people as to place him in his present position? Here was he, a quiet, peace-loving gentleman, whose income far exceeded any needs he might have, risking his life—nay, honor itself—in an adventure that rivaled any fiction he had ever read.

And for what? Merely because of a rash promise to a dying man whose brain was already clouded by the mists of final dissolution. A man, too, it now seemed, whose soul was blackened by every iniquity known to sin and crime. What would be the outcome? Already, it would seem, the very fact that LaFlore had granted him entertainment for a night had brought about the death of that aged and delightful old man. He might yet be brought to book for LaFlore's murder, doubtless would be. Also, it appeared that his advent into the strange, wild country had set in motion the very machinery of destruction. Three lay dead at the Cottonwood. They had just buried Mr. Erskine. LaFlore probably lay in his home, awaiting the obsequies. All this holocaust of death seemed to impinge upon or to be in some way concerned with the old fort. Old Brother Erskine had pronounced the place accursed. Could it be that the wrath of an outraged Creator had been breathed upon the place? Must destruction come to all who sought its mystery?

Then came another thought that caused Fletcher to start and look toward the door of the other room. He had already confessed to himself that, meeting Lola under any other circumstances, he would have been in love with her from the first moment he saw her—he, who had foresworn all women. Even now, in her grief, he longed to comfort her as a little child. What was the answer to his problem? What would another day bring forth? He had long since told himself that he ought to shake the dust of that unhallowed country from his feet. His conscience had said, "You made a promise, and in honor you cannot break it." His heart said to his conscience, "You are a liar! But for me, and for Lo-

la, you would long ago have been safe on the other side of Red River."

Hours later he fell into a deep but restless slumber.

CHAPTER IX

SAFE BEYOND THE BARRIER

LETCHER woke with a start. Rain was still falling on the cabin roof. There was now no wind, no thunder and lightning, but just a dull, sullen downpour. In the gray light that struggled through the single small window, he could see that Bill's pallet had been rolled neatly, and placed in a corner. The old hunter was not in the room. In the kitchen he could hear Lola preparing breakfast.

Dressing hurriedly, Fletcher put on his slicker and ran to the stable. He wanted to know that the big brown was there. Many things were in his mind as he ran through the rain. The horse was there, safe enough,—and old Bill was leaning against the side of the barn door, smoking his pipe.

"Mawnin', Cap'n Jo!" he greeted cheerily. "Right heavy dew. Don't recollect seein' a rain that was needed as bad since the drought of '81."

"Needed!" Fletcher exclaimed. "Why, the ground was already wet, and every little branch running."

"Yep. I know all that, but you and me needed this rain real bad. Sho' now!"

"I don't understand."

"Well, I reck'n this'll just about wash out our trail from the Cottonwood. Then, the old Ashumbala will be so wild that nobody can cross it for a week. Them marshals and police and things thataway didn't cross last night, and they can't cross."

"Oh, I see."

"Sho' now! I bet you do. This'll give you time to attend to yo' business around here. This old fort is on a high, rocky ridge between the Ashumbala and the Big Bois d'Arc Creek. It's rough country, and nobody in it. Old Parson Erskine was prob'ly the only settler on the ridge. The river valley is on the other side along here. Nobody can get in here, or get out, ontel the water goes down. We ain't got no business with that outfit across the river there."

"Do you really think——?"

"Yes, I really think. You don't understand the case, Cap'n. Now Miss Lola, I could see plumb plain that she understood when I was talking last night. You see, this Charlie LaFlore was a big man among 'em. Besides that, he was a good man, and everybody liked him. If he'd just been some common, creek-bottom tubby it wouldn't be so bad. As it is, yo' trial would prob'ly be right short and sudden, if they caught you. Them Injun police would report you killed while resisting arrest, and that would be about all—except a shallow grave somewhere in the woods."

There was a slight break in the rain, and they went back to the cabin. At breakfast Fletcher had little to say. He was going over the situation in his mind. Bill had referred to Fletcher's "business." What business did he have in that country? He had come there to right a wrong that Powell had done Erskine. The old preacher was beyond human ministrations now. He had come with a vague idea that the old fort had a secret to tell. LaFlore had told him Erskine could help him if he would. Erskine had first refused, and then procrastinated. Now, Erskine and LaFlore, the only two men on earth, perhaps, who knew anything of the secret, were both dead. His "business" was already finished. He should have ridden for Red River immediately after Mr. Erskine refused his request. He had carried out his promise to Powell, and that was all he meant to do. Then he looked up and caught the eye of Lola, who sat at the other end of the table. She was regarding him intently, and there was an odd look in her eyes, as if she would read his very thoughts.

Bill Sandridge put on his coat and trudged off down to the river. He wanted to make sure that the barrier was there. Fletcher threw a fresh log on the fire, sat down, and went on pondering his predicament. For the first time in his life he was a prisoner. The waters were holding him in durance, and his only safety seemed to be in the prison they made.

Lola came in, and he rose to place a chair for her. They sat in silence, staring into the fire. At last the girl spoke.

"Captain Fletcher," said she, "you are an officer and a gentleman, and I'm going to make an appeal to you. I am miserably unhappy. The death of Mr. Erskine, and of Mr. LaFlore, has taken from me the last friend I had on earth, whom I could trust with——"

"Except, please——"

"I'm coming to that. You have been

wonderfully kind, and now I want you to prove your sincerity."

"Prove it? Why——"

"Yes, I know you would say that your actions should be proof enough. Ordinarily they would be, but our situation is unusual. Forgive me if I seem harsh, in trying to make myself quite clear Mr. Erskine hated the very mention of a soldier, but I cannot escape the conviction that the word of an officer on his honor is infallible. I'm going to prove your sincerity by asking you, on your honor, to tell me of the mystery that surrounds me."

"Why, that's a hard——"

"Yes, yes. I know it's a hard stipulation, but on that must rest my trust and confidence."

"Why do you think there is a mystery?"

"Why? Don't think me a child, Captain Fletcher. Two days ago I was happy and contented, here in the cabin with the man I had always believed to be my father. You come into the country, and immediately all is changed. You ride in the buggy with Mr. LaFlore, and he is murdered. On the same day you call on Mr. Erskine, and that night he is——"

"Oh, please, Miss Lola! Don't believe that I had anything to do with those horrible crimes. I pledge you my word——"

"That is what I'm asking you to do. Explain to me, on your word of honor, what the mystery is."

"I wish I might, but I have to tell you on my word of honor that I don't know. I have puzzled over it until I'm almost distracted."

"You at least know how you came to be in this country." There was now a cold ring in her voice.

"Yes, I know that. It is a long story, and one that it would be cruelty to tell you."

"Perhaps, but more cruel to withhold it. I have wondered always why martial music set my blood racing. I have wondered why Mr. Erskine hated soldiers. Why he forbade me going to the old fort. He who had lived in the very shadow of the flag for so many years and so long acted as chaplain for the troops. I have never disobeyed him. I am twenty-five years old, yet I have never set foot within the grounds. Often I have sat watching the sunlight and the shadows of flying clouds on the old ruin. In my mind I have peopled it with officers and men, with flags flying and bugles blowing. It has always held a fascination for me."

"That would be quite natural, I think," Fletcher agreed. "Here in your isolation, you——"

"Don't temporize, Captain Fletcher. You know at least something of me. You called Mr. Erskine my grandfather. Why did you do that?"

"Because I knew——"

"Go on, please, and tell me."

"I knew your father."

"You knew my father! Who was he?"

"When I knew him, a brave and gallant officer in the regular army——"

"And my mother," the girl interrupted tersely. "Who was she?"

"Mr. Erskine's daughter, but——"

"Ah, God pity me! It is true then." Brokenly she buried her scarlet face in her arms. After all, what Corby had said was true. Mr. Erskine had several times of late seemed on the point of telling her something, but had always deferred it to another day. This was the hateful thing that his lips refused to tell, and now they were silent forever.

In mute agony Fletcher witnessed the girl's suffering, which was greater than her grief at the death of her grandfather, though she didn't cry out. She was consumed with the burning shame and humiliation of it.

In his heart Fletcher was saying, "An officer fell, and committed this crime against society, and this innocent girl. If in my power, I would right the wrong." And in that moment he knew that he loved this girl.

"Go on; tell me all," Lola resumed. "I want to know your part in it."

"It is a pitiful, sordid tale. Part of it I learned on a battlefield. Part of it I learned since I came here. Nothing can ever keep me from being your friend, and I would spare your hearing the story."

"Tell me, please. I'd rather know it all." Her voice trembled with suppressed emotion.

BEGINNING with the evening after San Juan Hill, he told her his story up to that moment. Everything that he knew. He spoke in low, gentle tones and spared her every pang that he could.

"And you have risked, and are still risking your life, in the hope of righting a wrong committed by a brother officer many years ago?" she said, when he had finished. "It is a beautiful, wonderful service, but

the task is hopeless. I have heard my poor grandfather say that there were some wrongs that could not be righted, some crimes that could not be expiated, some sins that could not be pardoned. I know, now, what he meant."

She was thoughtful for a few moments.

"You have proved your sincerity, Captain Fletcher," she then went on. "Your word is good, with me, from now on. My only concern is that you get safely out of this country, where every moment your life is in danger."

"You really think that?"

"I know it. Mr. Sandridge stated the case very clearly last night. He knows these people. I am sure that you are guilty of no crime, but they will not even stop to ask questions if they find you."

"And you? Are you not in danger?"

"It matters little what becomes of me. There are many things that I might do. My grandfather was a university man. He sent me two years to a seminary for certain training. After that he really educated me. I might teach, but there is always the social ban. It would militate against me in any but the humblest position."

"I am probably the only one who knows your secret, that is left alive, and I assure you——"

"Ah, but I know it! That knowledge would unfit me, would rob me of the necessary courage for success. But, there is a place for me somewhere."

There was no reply to that. Fletcher was unable to even attempt to put her mind right on the problem. He could only think of the wonderful courage of this woman. Admiration for her gripped him like a vise. He rose from his chair, and stood before her. His every nerve was tense with emotion. He had to speak, and yet he could scarcely find words.

"You said my word was good with you, from now on," said he, struggling to control his voice. "May I say what is in my mind, without fear of offending you?"

"Indeed yes. I know you will say nothing but what comes from the heart of a gentleman."

"I cannot frame what I have to say otherwise than in so many plain, blunt words. I assure you that it does come, honestly, from my heart. I have known you barely two days, but days and hours do not constitute time in the matter of acquaintance. The trials and dangers of those two days have lengthened them into years. From the first moment I saw you, you appealed to me as no woman has ever appealed before. Now, I know that I love you. I care nothing for what is past. Give me the right——"

As it dawned on Lola what this man would say, she sprang up, holding her hands before her, as if to ward off a blow.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "Please don't say it, Captain Fletcher. Think! You cannot mean——"

"But my heart is in every word of it, and without you my life will be wasted. Give me——"

"I cannot doubt your sincerity, but you are mistaking sympathy for love. I shall not deny that from the first you have attracted me. It is a noble thing for you to offer, but you shall not sacrifice yourself on the altar of pity!"

"I—it is not pity, but—" stammered Fletcher, but Lola had fled to the kitchen.

He walked to the front door and stood looking out across the dreary, rain-swept landscape. The clouds had lifted slightly, and far across the turgid flood of the Ashumbala he could see the misty outlines of those hills. They had seemed so beautiful to him as he rode through them two days before. His world had grown dark indeed since then. His business in the country was indeed finished, now.

Bill Sandridge came in the gate.

"Water's twenty foot deep where our camp was, but she won't stay up long unless it rained on the head of the river," he reported.

"The sooner it goes down, the better I shall be pleased," said Fletcher, absently.

"Why, you ain't been about the fort, yet."

"No, but I don't think I could do any good by going. Mr. Erskine is dead, and what I was trying to learn was really for him."

"It's coming on to noon, and the clouds is breaking," Bill observed. "I'd shore like to look at the old place again. S'pose we go up there this afternoon. We can't get away from here until the water goes down, and that won't be today."

"Very well."

Bill tried several times to lead Fletcher into conversation as they fed their horses, but the captain was unresponsive. Bill gave it up. Probably his companion was worried about their situation. Bill knew there was good cause for worry. He was unable to see his own way out of the tangle just then.

"Mebbe Miss Lola would rather go with us than to stay here by herself," said Bill,

as they were preparing to start for the fort about mid-afternoon.

Without reply, Fletcher went to the door. "Bill and I are going to the old fort. Perhaps you would like to come with us," he invited.

"Is it your desire that I go?" she asked.

"I should be glad to have you. It will be lonely here by yourself, and I can see no harm in your going."

"I'll be happy to grant at least one request," said she, and for the first time Fletcher saw that in her eyes which indicated the sacrifice she had made that morning when she refused his offer.

Lola's saddle was placed on Lazy Ned; Bill rode Tarrapin, and they set forward for the fort. Sandridge followed the trail as if he had been there the day before, and Fletcher, who rode in the rear of the single file, wondered at the man's memory of the place.

AT THE fort they dismounted, tied their horses and entered the old quadrangle. Many of the buildings had fallen to ruin. The wall was broken in places, but the two great square, stone gateposts at the east entrance were still standing.

As they walked slowly along, Fletcher asked Bill to point out the commandant's quarters, and the guide did so, without a moment's hesitation. Soon Bill was wandering about the place by himself, but keeping a watch on the two young people out of the corner of his eye.

Fletcher led Lola to the old quarters where Major Powell had lived.

"Here is the house where you were born," he said, in low, gentle tones.

"Here! Why, did——?"

"They lived here. Your father was the post commandant."

"Leave me here a little while," said she, her eyes suffused with tears.

She sat down in the open doorway and, covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly. Fletcher turned away, unable to control himself at sight of her grief, and rejoined Bill, who was standing in another part of the grounds, looking about him.

Sandridge again began pointing out familiar spots. There was the sutler's store, over yonder the mess hall; there in that corner the blacksmith shop, where he had shod many a horse. As they wandered about, Fletcher caught Bill's furtive glances at him and wondered again.

"Where was the flagpole, Bill?"

"Right on the corner of yon tower. You can see the stub, where it's been broke off again."

"Why again?"

"Well, you see, Cap'n, they had a kind of twister storm here, along in the '70's. The flag-mast was broke off about four foot from the top of the tower. They just took a waggin tongue and some clevices and spliced it. That's the flagpole they had when I left here."

"I see. How long would that wagon tongue be?"

"Around twelve foot, I reck'n."

"Making only sixteen feet from the roof to the top of the pole," Fletcher figured. "Strange they didn't have a better flagmast than that."

"Well, as I told you, Fort Kitt warn't hardly a post, then. They let things go just anyway."

They were standing near the point in the east wall where the tower rose. Fletcher turned his back to the wall, glanced at the angle of the shadow, the sun having broken through the clouds, and stepped toward the gate. At the edge of the shadow he stopped, took out his watch and looked at the time. Then he drew a notebook and pencil from his pocket and made an entry. After that, he stepped on toward the gate, stopping just inside of it.

Bill's lids were narrowed to a slit as he stood watching his employer, but he made no comment. Twenty feet south of the gate the wall was broken, and a great stone of the coping had rolled several feet inside the wall. Fletcher sat down on the stone and, without so much as a glance at Bill, began figuring a problem.

Bill had walked to the gate and was standing with his hand on the north post.

"Seen a funny thing happen here, one time," said he. "Feller coming through this gate with a load of hay. He wasn't watchin' his team, and they hung ag'in the cap of that south post. The anchor bolt that hilt the cap on bust, and that big rock fell off. Scat my hide! You orter heared the old colonel in command cuss. Hit took half a day to get it back."

Apparently Fletcher didn't hear. Presently he put the book and pencil back in his pocket, and sat for some moments in deep study. He was wondering at Lola staying so long in the old quarters where he had left her, but felt sure that no harm could come to her, as the place was within call.

Bill had not moved or spoken since

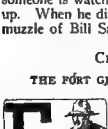
Fletcher had made no reply to his story of the gatepost. He stood with his hand on the solid masonry post. These posts were built of stone, and about two feet square. The caps were made of a single stone, ten inches thick, which projected slightly over the walls.

Presently, Fletcher rose, walked to the broken place in the wall, climbed to the top and walked along the wall to the south gatepost. The cap of the post was about two feet above the top of the wall. Stooping over, Fletcher caught hold of the cap, and with a mighty heave threw it off onto the ground. Bill's eyes flew open. He had not supposed this quiet, rather slender-looking young man had so much strength.

Fletcher put his hands on the top of the gatepost and stood staring at something. That peculiar sixth sense that tells us when someone is watching us caused him to look up. When he did, he was staring into the muzzle of Bill Sandridge's six-shooter.

CHAPTER X

THE FORT GIVES UP ITS MYSTERY



FLETCHER neither flushed nor wavered when he saw the situation. Bill Sandridge opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. Captain Fletcher remained perfectly still, his hands still on the top of the gatepost and his eyes fixed on Sandridge's face. He was not a hypnotist, but that strange, commanding thing that was in his eyes was holding Bill speechless.

Slowly, Bill's gun-hand dropped to his side, and the revolver went back into the holster. It just seemed to melt away like a bit of solder in an acetylene flame. Bill took a step back, before that awful, lurid stare.

"I—I—can't do it, Cap'n," he stammered. "I thought I could, but it ain't in my line."

"What's your idea, anyway?" That ringing note in Fletcher's voice that made the question a demand for a prompt answer was dominant.

"Why—why—well, I ain't just come plumb clean with you, Cap'n Jo, I——"

"No, it seems not. Go on."

"When I heared that this old country was goin' to be settled up, I decides to have one more look for that money."

"What money?"

"Why, the money you're looking for, of course."

"I'm not looking for money."

"Ain't—lookin'—for — money." The old hunter's face was a blank of astonishment. "What are you looking for, then?"

"A man's honor—and, I think I've found it."

With that Fletcher lifted from the niche in the top of the post a wooden box about the size of a brick. The brass hinges and clasp were green with canker. The box was not locked. Fletcher climbed down from the wall and sat down on the stone again. Opening the box, he took therefrom a package wrapped in oilskin. The package contained two yellowed papers. The first was a marriage certificate, setting forth that Major Walter Powell and Miss Lola Erskine had been duly married at Bonham, Texas, on a certain date. The other was a sheet of letter paper. On it was written, in a shaky hand:

Some day this will be found. If the Rev. Robert Erskine is still living, the finder will please give it and the marriage certificate to him. By that time he will have been sufficiently punished for his hatred of me and his cruelty to his daughter.

I did intend to give him the certificate before I left, but when he took Lola's baby and refused her dowry, when he sent back curses and threats, I hated him worse than ever.

Whatever may have been my other sins, never for one moment have I been disloyal to my poor dead wife, nor shall I ever be disloyal to her memory. Never a thought had I toward her but the most honorable. She has suffered much at the hands of an unreasonable father.

As I write this I am a broken man. All is lost. My poor wife is dead; I cannot take my little daughter with me, and even my honor is at stake.

Walter Powell,
Maj., U.S.A.

Reverently, Fletcher returned the papers to the box, and looked up at Bill. The old hunter stood as fixed as the stone posts, gazing in wonder at this strange man who had not even taken the trouble to watch him since his hostile action.

"Come here, Bill," commanded Fletcher.

Without a word Sandridge approached him.

"Sit down there on that rock. Now, let's have an understanding. You wanted

to kill me a while ago. Why didn't you do it?"

"Cap'n, I'm comin' clean with you, now. When you talked to me that morning at the camp, I knowed I hadn't mentioned Major Powell's name, and you knowed it. I found out from that that you was after something at the old fort. You say you don't know anything about the money. I'll tell you about it. This boy of old George Cantrell's that I told you about said Powell had taken all the money of the partnership, more than a hundred thousand in gold, and buried it somewhere about the old fort. That was what he wanted to have a reckoning with Powell about.

"A few more knowed about what the boy said. Men has tried every way to find that money. They've used these divining rods, and they dug for it, too; but none ain't ever been found. That fellow that Lola described as being hook-nosed and long-toothed is the Cantrell boy. He's been in here for twenty year. I 'low he'd taken Junay in with him and they was tryin' to make the old parson tell where the money was. More'n likely it was that same outfit kilt LaFlore. He knowed all about the old fort and Powell and the whole works.

"As for me, I been sneakin' around here for a month, taking a last look for it before this country settles up. When I think you are after it, and you offer me a job, I decides to stick along until you find it and then——"

"Bump me off, and take the pot," finished Fletcher, grimly.

"Well, Cap'n, I been hunting that money a mighty long time, and it was on my mind powerful. When I thought you'd found it, I just couldn't stand it. Seemed like I was as much entitled to it as you, and——"

"And you would have been. I know something of the call of gold, Bill. It is quite plain that the mere rumor of this buried gold has caused the death of at least two really good men—and endless other crimes and suffering. Your provocation was great, I'll admit, but you don't expect me to trust you again, do you?"

"Well, I wouldn't wonder you feel kinder skittish about me, but honest, Cap'n, I couldn't shoot you."

"Don't you think you and I had better hang together until we get out of this country?" Fletcher asked.

"I shore do, and I think we better get out pretty quick."

"All right, who's going to be boss?"

"You are, of course. You got me hired."

"Good enough. Go over yonder to that old blacksmith shop, sit down in the door, and stay there until I call you."

WITH a puzzled expression, Bill walked off to obey the order. Fletcher got up and walked to where he had left Lola. Not a thing had she seen or heard of what had transpired. She still sat where he had left her. At his approach she raised her tear-stained face. He took the papers from the box and handed them to her.

She read them, first in wonder; then, realizing their import, she clasped them to her breast.

"Where did you find them?" she asked.

"In the top of the gatepost."

"How did you ever come to look there?"

"Your father's last words were, 'shadow—flag—four—o'clock—May—first.' Tomorrow is the first day of May, and, reckoning from that, I found the cache."

Fletcher wanted this woman in his arms, but he realized that he had not pressed his suit before the discovery, and to renew it so soon afterward would be practically an admission that he had been deterred by what he believed to be true about her birth.

"Miss Powell, my errand is finished," he could only say now. "I have done what I could to right the wrong. I am in great danger here, and within the hour I expect to ride for Texas. I cannot think of leaving you here alone. If you'll go with Bill and me we'll do our best to see you safe in Texas. Your father has left your immediate needs provided for, and you will be independent."

"Why, I—I can think of nothing else to do, Captain Fletcher," stammered Lola, as if that was not what she expected him to say. "I've been thinking it over, and we are fugitives together."

"Come then, and we'll make preparation for leaving," Fletcher said. "I'll call you in a few minutes."

He walked over to where Bill sat in the door of the old shop.

"Bill," said he, "if we had found that gold, and you had gotten it, do you think you could have lived something like an honorable life afterward. Do you think you'd come clean with me and get me out of this country?"

"Cap'n Jo, that fit's off'n me. I'll shore come clean with you from now on. Give

me what you're a mind to, I'll get you out, and get out with you."

"Good!" said Fletcher, extending his hand.

He was very much in the state of mind of the general who said, "Trust in Providence, but keep your powder dry!" Still, it was just as well for Blil to feel that he had been forgiven. Then, too, Fletcher realized that he was at the man's mercy, for he had no idea of a way to get back into Texas without being caught.

"Now listen to me very closely, Bill. There is some money in that gatepost. I don't know how much, but not a great deal. It belongs to Miss Lola Powell. We'll take it out and count it. The moment you set me safe on the other side of Red River, I'll write you a check for the same amount. You'd have difficulty explaining the possession of a large amount of gold. I'll see that you get the money on the check without question. Is that fair?"

"Sho' now! I'll agree to anything you say, Cap'n. I ain't got no business in this country, myself; with them Injuns all riled up that way."

"All right. Bring a blanket from under your saddle. We'll count the money, tie it up, and take it to the Erskine cabin. Then we can be on our way."

Bill turned away to obey, and Fletcher stood looking after him. He had the man's gauge now. Sandridge had the cunning of a thief, without the courage of a killer. He was a good-natured mountebank, who would steal one's purse and then spend the proceeds of the theft on his victim. Knowing how untrustworthy the man was, Fletcher had no choice but to trust him further. Only with Bill's aid could he himself escape. He was relying on the fact that Sandridge was in great danger also, and the promise of money at the end, to hold the old hunter to his agreement.

He called to Lola, and she came over to him.

"Miss Powell," said he, "in the same place that I found those papers, I found some money. It is yours. I don't know how much there is, but I want you to be present when it is taken out."

They walked over to the gate and stood talking until Bill came back. In his hand he carried a double seamless bag.

"I been carrying this some time," he explained with a sheepish grin.

Fletcher climbed up on the wall.

"I'll hand it down, and you and Miss Lola count it," he directed.

"Oh, just chuck it in the bag. We can count it later," said Bill. "I feel just like somebody was watching me."

There was a straightening of the line of Fletcher's mouth. Somebody was watching Mr. Sandridge. The money was put into the bag, apparently a little more than thirty pounds of it, or about ten thousand dollars. As a matter of fact, that was the exact amount.

Back at the Erskine cabin, they prepared for flight. Bill said he'd divide the coin into three parts. Place each package in a blanket roll, and tie them behind the saddles. While he was doing this, Fletcher went to the cabin with Lola to get such things as she wished to take.

"You will be able to carry very little, Miss Powell. If there are things that you would like to have, you may be able to get someone to return for them."

"Here is the greatest treasure I have on earth," said Lola, handing him the two yellowed papers. "Keep them for me, please."

He took the papers and placed them in an inside pocket. In a very few minutes they were ready for the road. Mr. Erskine's old pony was turned out to a life on the range. The door was closed, and Lola took a good-by glance at the place where all her life had been spent. Bill led the way, Lola following on Lazy Ned, while Captain Fletcher, his face set like marble, brought up the rear.

"What's the route?" he asked.

"Straight for Red River, the quickest way, Cap'n. There's a trail leads right down by the Cottonwood. Nobody can cross the river in a little boat, now. She's a plumb wolf. At the mouth of the Ashumbala there's a little ferry that sets folks ashore either above or below the mouth of the river. That's dangerous, because an Indian posse might get over here that way. But then, chances has got to be took. Besides that, we might run into some police or something in the Red River bottom. All we can do is take a chance. It's twenty mile, and if something don't stop us we'd orter reach Red River in the night."

"What about high water?"

"Ain't nothin' on this side of the Ashumbala to make no difference. If we should strike something deep, why, we'll just have to wait ontel she runs down."

"Fair enough," Fletcher agreed. "Lead out."

Darkness found them about halfway to the Cottonwood. Fletcher called a halt.

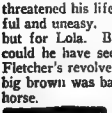
"Is there no way we can get down to Red

River without passing this Cottonwood ranch?" he asked.

"Not none a-tall, Cap'n. The road's a hundred yards or more from the river along there, and we'll get by in the dark. If anybody seen us, they couldn't get across."

"All right. Go ahead, but be careful."

What was passing in Fletcher's mind in the next few miles was a puzzle even to himself. At the mercy of a man who had threatened his life, he was naturally watchful and uneasy. Not so much for himself, but for Lola. Bill would have wondered could he have seen that most of the time Fletcher's revolver was in his hand and the big brown was barely a step behind Lola's horse.



N THEY rode, splashing through water in the low places and stumbling over boggy ground. They passed the Cottonwood ranchhouse, which showed dim in the light of the cloud-obscured moon. There was no light, no sign of life about the place. Four miles farther on, and Bill suddenly pulled up his horse.

"Up ag'in it now, Cap'n," he said. "Red River's on a wild rise, too. She's backed the Ashumbala up until this bayou's full. Mostly it ain't knee deep where this trail crosses, but she'd swim a steamboat now."

"Well, you said we'd go until the water stopped us," Fletcher reminded. "Here we are. How far is it to Red River?"

"About two mile. Trouble is, you don't just savvy the kind of a pocket we're in. If anybody comes up, we can't get out. They's a trail runs up this side of the bayou. We could follow it, head the backwater and come down on the other side. It might be three or four mile out'n the way, but then we'd be safe. From here on to Red River is thick bottom; we could stay in there a month and never be seen."

"Then, by all means let's get into that bottom the best way we can. You are the guide. Go ahead and do what you think is best."

As they turned into the trail, Fletcher was thinking hard. It was all right for Bill to know the trails about the old fort, but he was entirely too familiar with the ways in this dark bottom. All of that month that he claimed to have been looking for the old sutler's gold evidently had not been spent at the fort.

They had ridden half a mile or more, when suddenly from the dense forest ahead of them came the command, "Halt there!"

Bill Sandridge whirled his horse and dashed back along the trail.

"Run for it!" he called to Fletcher. "They won't follow in the dark."

There was no use telling Lola to run. Lazy Ned had whirled and was running neck and neck with the Tarrapin.

"We're in a pretty tight hole," panted Bill, when they stopped in the very forks of the river and the bayou. "They won't crowd us now, but in the morning they'll pick us up."

"We can still go back up the river," said Fletcher.

"I reck'n not. That posse knows this country. They've already got somebody cutting across to guard that trail back up the Ashumbala."

As they sat talking, there came a distant call from up the bayou.

"Hush! Listen!" said Bill.

The moon had struggled through the clouds, and the old hunter was standing clear in the moonlight. He was looking intently toward the direction from which the call had come and didn't notice Feltcher as he pushed the big brown close by the side of Lola's mount. Again the call came; Not an ordinary halloo, but a call with a peculiar ending, like a short word. Fletcher saw his guide pull himself together in the saddle and drive in his spurs for a quick whirl. At the same instant this quiet captain's right hand shot out and seized Lola's bridle rein, while from his left hip there was a spurt of flame. The top of Tarrapin's head was literally shot away, and the horse sank to its knees and rolled over.

Bill Sandridge managed to fall clear and rose running up the trail. Fletcher made no effort to stop him. Sandridge had failed to shoot him once that day; now they were even. From here on——

Mr. Sandridge, outlaw, member of a tough gang that had its headquarters in this tough part of Red River bottom, had made two very serious mistakes. The first was when he mistook his own gang for marshals or Indian police. The other, and greater one, was in his measurement of Captain Joel Fletcher. Two years in the cavalry had changed this man's poise in the saddle. Two years of the punctilious and dignified speech of an officer had added to his already polished bearing. But there was one thing that had not been changed. The innate fighting qualities of the man were the same. His natural shrewdness

and knowledge of men, good and bad, gained by two years in the ranger service before he joined the volunteers, were still intact. His accuracy with a six-shooter, which amounted almost to certainty, was the same.

"Dismount as quick as you can," Fletcher said coolly.

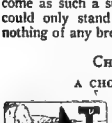
When Lola was on the ground, he reached over and untied the pack behind her saddle, letting it fall to the ground. He then turned Lazy Ned loose, and the animal walked to the dead body of its running mate and stood sniffing it in wonder.

The ex-ranger's next step was to remove the pack from the dead horse and drag the two blanket rolls back into the thick trees, leading his own horse into the shadow.

It had all happened so quickly, and had come as such a surprise to Lola, that she could only stand and gasp. She knew nothing of any break between the two men.

CHAPTER XI

A CHOICE OF EVILS



"NOW, Miss Powell," said Fletcher, calmly, "our situation is simply this. We have been betrayed by an outlaw. I knew he was crooked, but it was either trust him or do worse. Perhaps I should have shot him, but he had a chance to get me once today and didn't do it."

"What made you suspect him? I thought he was the kindest, gentlest of men."

"Many things. The fact that all the gold was in his pack and yours and nothing but a roll of blankets behind my saddle, was one of them. The trained horses that couldn't be separated, was another. When I saw his purpose to ride away to his gang, while Lazy Ned followed with you and the balance of the gold, I fired."

"We have gained nothing," said Lola. "Only a respite. We are helpless. If we had gone with him, perhaps they would have taken the gold, and let us go about our business."

"Possibly, but I doubt it. Bill Sandridge, if that is really his name, is the most dangerous sort of a bad man—because he acts and looks so good and innocent. He had me fooled completely until this afternoon. Since we left the old fort I had expected some trick, but I thought I could outwit him."

"And you have for the time, but what are your plans?" Lola asked. "Shall we try to ride back the way we came? We might still escape that way."

"Not since Bill has joined his gang. But for the money, we might. They'll never give up that without a fight. Besides that, nobody could ride Lazy Ned away from his dead mate."

"Then, you go alone. When they come, I'll give them the money, and—" The moon came out just then, and she caught a glimpse of Fletcher's face. "Oh, forgive me for saying that! I know you wouldn't go, but——"

"This is no time to talk of absurdities," said he, coldly. "That gang has no right to hold anybody to ransom. Since we can't leave here, the only thing to do is stay and fight."

Near the bank of the bayou were three great cottonwoods, apparently growing from the same stump. They formed a triangle, with the opening toward the bank. Fletcher's lips were drawn in a grim line as he unsaddled the horses, dragged the packs into the triangle, and chinked the interstices between the trees with saddle blankets. Then he hung a saddle, by the stirrup, in each of the openings, leaving a loop-hole below it. Soldier and ranger and, more than all else, a game fighting man, he was preparing for his last stand.

He had only his six-shooter and perhaps fifty rounds of ammunition, but he would give the best account of himself that he could. He had come into this country on a peaceful mission. He had done no wrong. He refused to be murdered without at least making a fight for his life.

He had just finished the crude fortification and had gotten Lola and the packs safely stowed in it, when she clutched his arm.

"Look! Look there!" she whispered hoarsely, pointing down the bank.

"What is it," he asked, excitedly, whirling and expecting to see some of the enemy that had slipped around behind them.

"The boat. See it!"

There in the still backwater rode the boat in which Lola had escaped from Panola. It had floated down and, meeting the backwater, had floated into the bayou. It was a deep, roomy boat, large enough to accommodate six persons, and in it were two pairs of oars.

"Maybe you can reach it. We could get away in that," she suggested.

"Yes. Away from here, but not very far, I should think," said Fletcher.

With a long, dead branch that he picked

up from the ground, he drew the boat to the bank, found the line and tied it to a tree.

"It is a chance, anyway," said he. "We haven't much chance here, fighting that outfit. Are you willing to try it?"

"Yes, yes! Anything, rather than see you fight that gang of outlaws alone."

All right. You stand in the angle of those trees and watch and listen. If you see or hear anything, don't cry out. Don't make a sound. I'll bail the water out of the boat and get the packs aboard."

With a cup that was in the boat, he rapidly and noiselessly bailed out the rain water that had caught in the boat. He had finished, had put in two of the packs, and had gone back after the other pack and Lola, when she clutched his arm.

"There's a man behind that tree," she whispered, indicating a big cottonwood that stood not more than fifty feet away.

LETCHER remembered the call of the lost turkey, and the stealthy movements of Bill Sandridge. He cursed himself for ever trusting the man after that incident, but it was too late now. His only reply was to take the pack under one arm, grasp Lola's hand, and lead her softly down to the boat. They had barely stepped into it, and taken seats when they heard Bill's voice.

"Come, Fletcher, we've got you in a hole," he called out. "Let's talk it over. The money's all we want. Give it to us, and you and the girl can go about your business."

A dense cloud sailed over the moon. Fletcher pushed the boat from the bank.

"Let's rush 'em, Bill," another voice in the darkness suggested, just as the craft floated clear. "They ain't got a chance. If they give up we'll let 'em go. If there's any gun work we'll just kill 'em, that's all."

"Rush hell!" replied Bill. "You can rush 'em, if you want to. There's a tiger cat in that brush, and he claws from the hip, real sudden and masterful."

The cloud thickened for a moment. Fletcher dipped the oars silently and pulled around the point of land at the lower side of the mouth of the bayou. He was none too soon. A shot was fired, and the bullet whistled through the trees over their heads. A moment later a perfect fusillade was poured into the place they had just left.

The water was filled with drift, but there was no current. Slowly they pulled down the stream, keeping close to the line of cottonwoods on the left bank. Half a mile from the scene of their recent danger, the boat drifted under a low hanging tree. Fletcher caught the branches and stopped it.

"Do you think they'll follow us?" asked Lola, in low, guarded tones.

"Hardly. They'll think we slipped away on foot, and won't be able to track us until morning. That is not long, however. It is considerably past midnight, now. Trust Bill Sandridge to read the signs of that boat against the bank as soon as he can see. They'll head the backwater and come down on this side."

"And we'll be in the open boat, at their mercy."

"Exactly," Fletcher agreed. "We have a choice between two evils."

"What are they?"

"Well, the situation is this. All we have to do is to make our way through the drift to the west side of the river, and we'll be in a few hundred feet of LaFlore's fence and the road that leads to the ferry."

"Let's do that, then."

"There's this danger in that. The river is very high, and we couldn't get through the bottom to call the ferryman. More than that, every crossing on Red River is probably being watched for the man on the big brown horse."

"But you haven't the brown horse any longer."

"No, I haven't the horse, but old Shadrach, that shrewd old negro ferryman, could identify me as the man who rode the brown horse and whom he sent to LaFlore's."

A silence fell between them. Fletcher had no intention of taking the chance of that ferry. He knew that would never do. What he was trying to do was to make the other danger, which was great, look smaller by comparison.

"What is the other choice?" she asked.

"To win our way on to the mouth of the Ashumbala and cross Red River in this boat."

"Why, that seems the sensible thing to do. We'd have to cross in a rowboat, if we went to the ferry."

"Yes, but we'd have a boatman who knew the stream to row that boat," Fletcher pointed out. "I'm not much at this busi-

ness. That little pull in smooth water made me blow."

"Let me row!" Lola offered. "I had a boat on the river and have rowed all my life."

"Oh, I'm all right for straight pulling. I just don't know how to handle a boat. I've been watching the things you did with that steering oar, and I think the best thing is for you to keep on using it. I also think we'd better be drifting on and try to cross with the first daylight."

Steadily and silently they pulled ahead down the stream. They had gone but a little way when the bank began to rise on their left. Gradually it grew higher and higher as they dropped down the stream. They kept close under it and, the water now being clearer of drift, made better headway. There was little steering to do, and Lola sat trailing her oar over the stern of the boat and looking ahead. They turned a bend, and she gasped.

"There's the river!" she cried.

Just ahead of them was a bending tree, the limbs clearing the water by a few feet. Clutching a limb, Fletcher stopped the boat and, turning, glanced down the stream. A beautiful but fearsome scene greeted him.

Through the lane of cottonwoods that normally marked the banks of the Ashumbala could be seen the broad, sweeping waters of Red River. The clouds were now gone, and the westering moon transmuted the tawny water into silver. Limned in bold relief, great logs and trees shot by from time to time on the crest of the boiling current.

Captain Fletcher gazed on the scene, enthralled by its sublime beauty. Then his eyes took in nearer things. Tied up in the deep water, against the east bank of the Ashumbala, and just a little way below them, was a ferryboat. On the high bank, above and a little way beyond the boat, stood a covered wagon, with projecting bows at front and rear. The captain knew it for a Government wagon. A dying campfire that had burned through the night was flickering faintly.

Reaching for the line, Fletcher tied up the boat to a hanging limb and cautiously moved back to the seat where Lola sat.

"Miss Powell, you are safe now," he said in a guarded whisper. "There is a camp of United States marshals. They will give you protection from the outlaws and also from the Indians, should they attempt to molest you, which I doubt. We can drop quietly down there to that boat. I can put you and your money aboard it. In the morning you can appeal to the marshals for protection and for assistance to get across to Texas.

"It's all right for me to take that frightful chance. My life is forfeit, if I stay on this side, no matter who takes me. You are no longer in danger, and I cannot let you take the risk. If I come through alive, I hope you'll call on me if you ever need a friend. Here is my address."

Fletcher was holding out toward the girl a small card, but she didn't even glance at it. She was looking at his face. In her eyes he saw that which made him more loath than ever to risk her life in that maelstrom.

"Daylight will be coming soon," she said, in low, steady tones. "This is no time to be talking of absurdities," repeating what he had said to her when she asked him to escape and leave her to the bandits. "You have no skill with a boat, and your life wouldn't be worth a penny if caught on this side the river, notwithstanding I know you are innocent of any wrong. After what you have done for me, my own life would—" She faltered, and regained control with an effort. "Cast loose, and let's be going. The moon makes plenty of light and that camp may be stirring any moment."

Fletcher knew no woman would take that desperate chance for a man she didn't love. His heart was singing in spite of the great danger as he cast the boat loose. Silently he paddled it past the ferry and on to where he could feel the undertow begin to pull as he thrust his oars deep into the water.

Hugging the high bank, they stopped for a moment to collect themselves for the plunge. They were on the very border line between two great dangers. One was behind them; the other in front. Lola sat calmly in the stern of the boat, grasping her steering oar. Fletcher longed to take this brave, matchless woman in his arms, but the time was not opportune. He had now more to live for than merely the saving of his own life. He was going into a battle such as he had never known before. A battle of wits and strength, and with a greater prize at stake.

"Don't exhaust yourself with pulling too hard, now," whispered Lola, as she sat staring at the boiling flood. "The most we can do is to keep the boat headed upstream, and let the current carry us over. We shall land somewhere, sometime."

She dropped her head in silence, and Fletcher knew she was praying.

MANY a time after that night, Fletcher saw that voyage in troubled dreams. The white moonlight on the water. The great, rolling, bursting waves; long, slimy logs that slithered by like monsters of the deep; great trees that rolled and splashed in their passage, tossing their limbs in the flood like a fever-stricken invalid, and threatening the frail boat that danced on the crest of the torrent. With consummate skill, Lola steered the boat, missing the tumbling drifts by the narrowest of margins. With desperation, Fletcher rowed until his arms seemed ready to drop from the shoulder sockets.

It seemed ages, though it was in reality not an hour, until the boat, racing down the swift stream, gradually won its way across the current. With a last mighty effort, Fletcher pulled it into eddy water at the mouth of a small bayou. Springing from the boat, he dragged it onto the sandy bar and, rising, held out his arms to the one woman in the world.

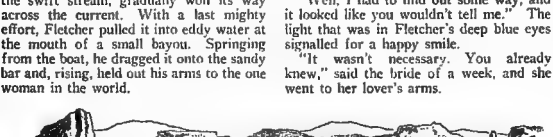
Cheated of their prey, Bill Sandridge and his gang very wisely replaced Fletcher's saddle on the big brown, and turned him loose to be found by the officers, after removing the carcass of the Tarrapin and coaxing Lazy Ned away from the place. A week later, when the river went down, the horse was found. The Indian police reported that its rider had probably drowned in attempting to cross the Ashumbala.

At the same moment that the police were discussing these probabilities, Lola and Fletcher sat on the broad gallery of an old South Texas home, where magnolias and cape jessamines bloomed and spring airs waved the branches.

"Did you really think, Joel, that I would take that pitiful gold, and leave you, when you offered to put me on the ferryboat?" Lola was saying.

"Well, I had to find out some way, and it looked like you wouldn't tell me." The light that was in Fletcher's deep blue eyes signalled for a happy smile.

"It wasn't necessary. You already knew," said the bride of a week, and she went to her lover's arms.



John Colter's Wanderings

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

THE course of John Colter's wanderings in the West are well worth following, especially the remarkable loop he made without a companion. He was a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition to Oregon, but when the Mandan Villages were reached on the return trip—on the Missouri River about sixty miles above site of Bismarck, N. D.—he procured his discharge and, with two hunters went back to the Rocky Mountains, to hunt and trap on the Yellowstone River, in the Blackfoot country. One of these men Colter left, and the other was killed by the Blackfeet, Colter only escaping by a remarkable display of wits, courage and endurance. He built a skin canoe and started down the Missouri (1807) for St. Louis, when he met Manuel Lisa's Missouri Fur Company expedition at the mouth of the Platte. Colter was hired as guide and again went back to the mountains. It was in the summer of this year that he made his great journey of exploration. Dispatched by Lisa to get in touch with the hostile Blackfeet, Colter left the new post at the mouth of the Big Horn River, and alone and guided only by his hunter's instinct, he traveled south, made a big loop across the Continental Divide and returned to the post. On this trip he was the first white man to see and explore the Wind River Valley and the pass at its head, Jackson's Hole, the Teton Mountains and Teton Pass, the headwaters of Green River, Pierre's Hole (the Valley of the Teton), the headwaters of Snake River, and the entire length of Yellowstone National Park. Up to then no white man had ever glimpsed any part of this great wonderland. In 1810 he went down the Missouri again, alone in a skin canoe, and reached St. Louis, where, he reported his discoveries and described the wonders of the Valley of the Yellowstone. Only a few men believed him, and he was scorned and ridiculed, and given the name of being the greatest liar in the country. He died, in 1813, before his name was cleared and proof given to his claims.

THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

By James B. Hendryx

ROMANCE, tragedy, gruelling labor, hardship, exposure, death—these are the coins with which frontiers are bought. And in these coins the "Mounted" has paid.

Brought into existence in 1873 for the purpose of establishing and maintaining law and order in the vast tract known as the North West Territories, newly acquired by the Dominion Government from the Hudson's Bay Company, the force, known then as the North-West Mounted Police, actively took the field in 1874.

Three hundred strong, this military constabulary marched from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains, through a territory badly mapped and only partially explored. Posts were established and part of the force returned to winter in Manitoba—truly a remarkable initial performance when one considers that these men marched two thousand miles in four months.

During the earlier years of the force the Indian situation was at all times critical. The buffalo was fast disappearing—and upon the buffalo the plains Indian depended for sustenance. He faced destitution and he knew it, and he knew that the white man's slaughter of the buffalo was the cause. Then came the Custer massacre and five and six thousand Sioux under Sitting Bull sought sanctuary on the Canadian side of the line in 1876. Failing in their efforts to induce Canadian Indians to join them in an uprising against the whites, they remained a decided menace to the peace of the Dominion until 1880. It was a delicate situation and only the tact and diplomacy of the Mounted averted disaster. Yet with the tact and diplomacy went absolute fearlessness, as witness the Salteaux incident.

The police at Wood Mountain post one day found six Salteaux Indians murdered and scalped. They suspected the Sioux. A single surviving Salteaux confirmed their suspicions, giving the names of the murderers. Before the police could act down charged the Sioux, five hundred strong under Sitting Bull himself, howling and yelling and demanding the surrender of the remaining Salteaux. But the Sioux hordes ran against a stone wall. The stone wall was Sergeant McDonald of the Mounted.

When the great chief leaped from his horse and thrust the muzzle of his rifle into McDonald's midriff by way of enforcing the demand, the sergeant brushed it aside and invited the chief to a powwow, first insisting that the howling mob be dispersed. Sitting Bull complied, whereupon McDonald explained the law to the chief and told him, moreover, that he intended to send his men to the Sioux camp and arrest the murderers. He did so, forthwith—sent three constables! And the constables returned with their prisoners, who were duly tried, convicted, and executed.

By scores of similar incidents the Mounted have established themselves in the minds of the Indians, and by scores of similar incidents are they maintaining their status.

Not in every instance do they "get away with it." Men of the Mounted have been killed in attempting to make arrests, but justice, swift and sure, has sought out the offender; and this the Indians have learned. And the white men have learned it.

And the Eskimo are learning it now. On April 1st, 1922 Corporal Doak was murdered at Tree River post on the Arctic by an Eskimo prisoner under arrest for murder of another Eskimo the previous year. On July 12th, 1923, the prisoner was tried, convicted, and sentenced to be executed. This trial was one of two that were held

last year north of the Arctic coast line. The judge and the prosecutor, from Edmonton, and the attorney for the defense, from Ottawa, journeyed to Herschel Island in the Arctic Ocean and before a jury collected from Good Hope, Aklavick, Herschel Island, and Fort Norman, the latter hundreds of miles up the Mackenzie, the case was tried. Thus, on one frontier is upheld the might and majesty of the law.

Nor has the Canadian frontier been lacking in its "hard" element of whites. Probably no more defiant outlaws, outside open piracy, ever foregathered than the bands of whisky-runners and renegades that took refuge north of the International Boundary from the United States authorities in the '70's and '80's. It did not take this element long to learn that, in the language of the Mounted, "Get your man" meant "Get your man", preferably alive, but—it meant get him and bring him in, and along with him evidence sufficient to convict him of the crime charged.

The men of the North learned the same lesson when, along with hundreds of good men, the scum of the earth poured into the Yukon gold fields. No easy job there. The handful of men under Inspector Constantine, in addition to enforcing the law, acted as customs officers, mail-carriers, mining recorders, arbitrators, and relief corps. Inspector Constantine notes that when he arrived first on the Yukon it was 77° below zero, there were four hours of daylight, and candles were a dollar apiece!

In 1905 the honorable prefix "Royal" was incorporated in the official title of the force and the Royal North-West Mounted Police it remained until February 1st, 1920, when a general reorganization took place. An old, and more or less active, organization known as the Dominion Police was absorbed, the official title changed to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the field of operation enlarged to include all Canada.

The term Mounted Police has lost much of its descriptive significance during the latter half of the force's existence. In its inception, with its field of operation practically confined to the Western plains with few trails, no fences, and an abundance of water and forage, the horse was an indispensable necessity. Even today he holds an important place in the service. But with the settlement of the provinces, the building of railways and roads, steam and gasoline have proved an ever increasing factor in police transportation.

Also, as the police moved northward, exigencies of terrain and fodder necessitated the supplanting of the horse with the dog and the canoe.

Few people realize the varied assortment of duties that the Mounted are called upon to perform. Aside from their natural functions as peace officers, they act as soldiers, customs collectors, game wardens, timber cruisers, relief corps, mail-carriers, in addition to furnishing aid to numerous other government departments. The mail is carried across thousands of miles of untracked and unmapped wilderness. Sick and starving natives, both Indian and Eskimo, are ministered to under the most trying conditions of exposure to disease and extreme cold.

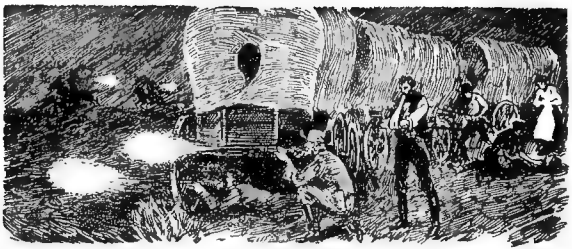
Year by year the Mounted is carrying the law farther and farther into the North. With detachments already on the Arctic coast from Herschel Island to Fullerton, the extreme northwest corner of Hudson's Bay, new detachments have within the past four years been established on Hudson Straits, two in Baffin Land and one on Ellesmere Land. Lat. 76:12!

In 1917-18 Inspector French and Sergeant Major Caulkin, with four natives, one a woman, and twenty-five police dogs, made a patrol from Baker Lake detachment that necessitated four thousand five hundred miles of foot travel under such adverse conditions as insufficient snow for sled travel, water on the sea ice, and serious food and fuel shortages. The patrol was made for the purpose of investigating the murder of Radford and Street, the former an American, killed in 1912 by natives.

That patrol will stand among the great patrols of the Mounted, the deeds of mighty men whose terse reports conceal far more than they tell of hardship and suffering in the performance of duty.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has no place for a weakling. To remain on its roster a man must prove himself mentally, morally, and physically fit. From the very nature of his duties any constable may be called upon at any time to undertake a detail or patrol that will keep him out of touch with his superiors for months at a stretch.

During this time he is entirely dependent upon his own resources. Upon his judgment depends his success—very often his life, and the lives of others. And be it said to the credit of the force that in the fifty years of its existence this judgment has rarely failed.



SPITTIN' BILL AND WHITTLIN' DICK

By CLEM YORE

Author of "Micky Malone from San Antone," "Panatella's Redemption," etc.

Indian war-whoops welcomed him to the frontier; Indian warfare tested and trained him; and Indian scalps—well, Spittin' Bill carried thirty with him, and that was only part of his toll

WHEN Billy Wharton went West, for the very first time, he was seven years of age, could read painfully, and write, after a printing-fashion. Education, as some men comprehend it, left him there.

He, and his father and mother, good, staunch Scotch-Irish, from Waltondale, Missouri, had joined a train of wagons headed for Denver City, then in the territory of Kansas.

From the Missouri River on, the journey became a dream to the child; a dream composed of his mother's delightful picturing, enlarged upon by his bearded father's explanatory dialog. Life took on the aspect of a vast, rolling meadow—laden with great vistas of colored bloom, packed with belly-deep grass, filled with the creak of leather, the smell of sweat, of jar and bounce and crunching tires, the straining of giant oxen and slim legged mules. And it was studded with great nights around roaring camp-fires and tales from an old man of shaggy brows, remarkably dirty, who always wore a buckskin suit; he was the guide of the train. Alec, they called him.

The boy's mind danced with delight and his pulses raced with the romance of those hours. Yet he loved most the feel of his mother's swaying form as, of afternoons, he curled up with his head in her lap and went to sleep.

Early one evening the train halted where no stop was due. Men and women ran forward, almost a mile, and Willie hurried with them. There, in the road, was a scene of indescribable horror. The spot was Elm Creek, thirty-six miles east of Fort Kearney. The child saw the bodies of eight men, scalped; and partly burned wagons, lying on their sides, were still faintly smoking. The people were awed. Alec explained the tragic end of that outfit and pronounced the deed to have been consummated within the past twelve hours. Injuns!

Injuns! A great revulsion arose in the child's breast and for the next two days he was quiet indeed.

Fort Kearney was reached and Billy Wharton saw the soldiers and their commander, a major, who strutted about, wide of shoulder, narrow of hips, slim of leg, and wearing a long mouth-covering mustache. He had an eagle's eye and once patted the boy's head. They called him

Old Hell-Snorter and his language was of a strange quality, when the women were not in hearing. He set out to the north, before the train went west, and with his going a manner of loss took possession of the little fellow.

One, two, seven days went by. Days to chill your blood!

Injuns! Injuns! Utes, Arapahoes, Ogalalla Sioux!

It was all young Billy heard. His mother read to him from the Bible; just before they went to sleep in each other's arms in the wagon-bed, his father lying on the ground, out of the dew, directly under them. Through a back opening the stars passed in review.

The night of the eighth day from the fort, he awoke to a fiend's panorama and a bedlam of awesome sound. Guns were firing; the wagons were empty; women huddled in advantageous places; the hundred men were lying on their stomachs, shooting through the wagon-wheels, some using the tongues as a rest. Outside, around and around, galloping, galloping, in a wide circle, were strange and ghostlike forms, mounted on small horses. Men fell about the child; women screamed and prayed; more men fell; one side of the inner circle no longer gave response to the missiles which crashed through wagon covers and between the forms of the bellowing oxen. Then the last of the guns was discharged; the women were silent, gathered in a spot where some wounded lay. One deep voiced woman was repeating words from the Bible. Billy followed her, in strange mental repetition; he knew that passage, the twenty-third psalm. The sound of the woman's voice was soothing; it stilled his heart. Off beyond the rim of the white wagon tops he still heard the galloping, galloping; once in a while the whirr of an arrow. The psalm droned on. The monotony was sweet.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

He saw the lips of his mother, in the pale moonlight, trembling, and knew that she, too, was following the woman. Then he spied a thing on its knees, coming between the wagons; it had a heavy club in its hand and a knife in its mouth and feathers on its head.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

"Amen! Amen! Amen!" The psalm ended. A hush fell.

More crawling forms beneath the wagons. Then a rush and a dull thudding sound back of him and he turned and saw a painted face leering at him as it passed an active knife around the head of a wounded man; the top of the man's head and all his hair came off with the Indian's hand. The women ran. He saw three knocked down; they stiffened as they fell and each had a knife passed around her head. His mind stagnated; then——

Something collided with him and, when he jumped up, he heard his mother screaming and turned to see her struggling to escape from a feathered devil. Without hesitation he launched his tiny form at that broad bare back and bit with his sharp teeth into a sweating shoulder. Yet he uttered no sound.

Quickly he was flung from his position, and the figure upon which he had leaped rushed at him. But another form stepped in between, his gargoyle face wreathed in a broad grin. Billy was grasped by this second figure and lifted to his shoulder and carried away. To steady himself he placed an arm about the Indian's head and crushed soft feathers in his hand. Strangely, he felt unafraid.

Some distance from the train and he was dumped to the earth and saw that a large group of mounted men were gathering about a little knoll. The man who had rescued him seemed to be a leader.

Amid a great shouting of voices and running about of naked forms the pillage of the wagons was completed; then a fire broke out and illuminated the prairie for a great distance.

His protector said strange words to him, with a smile, then lifted him to the back of a calico pony and the band started away from the scene. In three days the march ended in the hills; and here Billy was a curiosity to Indian women and children.

Days, weeks and months went by. Winter came, and he shivered in a cold creek bottom where the willows and aspens, stripped of their leaves, made a desolate sight, backgrounded against the dull, deep snow. He learned to talk to those about him; formed an odd, wild affection for his savior, and went with him on many hunting trips. Toward spring a white man entered the camp and Billy talked with him. The next day, when the white man left, the child accompanied him. For ten years the stripling roamed the plains and hills, north and south, everywhere. He grew hard as nails, straight as an arrow, strong

of lungs and heart and mind. He hated Indians. And he learned to chew tobacco.

And because of his proficiency in this habit they called him Spittin' Bill. Boswell of Laramie termed him so, and the name stuck.

THE Kansas Pacific Railroad was building to Denver. The Indians were furious, defiant, menacing. And the West was filled with officers who had fought through a great war against a resolute and magnanimous foe; fought with modern weapons along scientific lines, battled with machinery and maps and in uniforms that were made especially of first-class target material. They were yet to learn what cunning was, what natural animal warfare could be—camouflage and open-order.

Forty men under the command of Lieutenant Richard Comstock were winding their way, on jaded and over-packed cavalry horses, down the bottom of a river, now gone dry; for the month was August. Fort Kearney was one hundred and twelve miles away, as a crow would fly; Fort Kearney, that had been successfully attacked by redskins and was now re-conditioned and re-manned and re-officered. Lieutenant Comstock was one of the latest experts detailed by the War Department. He had graduated from West Point six months before. He was handsome, brave, a brilliant fellow; his men loved him—loved the rakish angle at which he set his hat, the swagger of his walk, the superb manner of his horsemanship. He was a man's man!

But now, on an expedition for the relief of an emigrant train to the north of his post, he had been caught in between two large moving bands of savages and was retreating down the valley of the stream. Scout news had conveyed to him the information that these Indians might be converging on a central point; surely they were aware of the presence of the soldiery, that was a granted fact.

So the retreat became a manner of hurried ride and the lieutenant had placed himself at the head of his column and pointed down the river. The cavalrymen looked at one another; a grizzled old top sergeant cursed beneath his mustache and spat tobacco juice over the top of a sagebrush, but he rode valiantly beside his men. On they went.

At two o'clock, as they glanced up at some high clay bluffs, they saw a solitary figure on horseback staring down at the dusty column. The figure waved a hat, and after a while disappeared to join the troop further down the stream where a trail led from the rise.

He was a white man, a young white man, and he rode directly toward the commander. Before he spoke he ejected a brown stream from his mouth upon the sand.

"Better be gettin' the hell outa yere," were his first words.

"Who are you?" queried the lieutenant. The top sergeant rode up.

"Lieutenant," he said, "this is Spittin' Bill Wharton and we're sure in luck. He knows this country backward."

The genial, open-hearted officer shook hands with the strangely clad man who sat his saddle so compactly.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Up the Platte. I have to be in that country right soon. Got a lot of business of my own up thata way." Spittin' Bill explained.

"Have you seen Indians today?"

"All about me, everywhere. Like fleas, now that you boys is sashaying this way. Where you going?" Wharton asked, in turn.

"Back to Kearney."

"Better get out of this bottom."

"This stream is the quickest route," the officer argued.

"To hell!" replied Spittin' Bill.

A man giggled back in the troop. The sergeant glanced over his shoulder.

"Will you undertake to guide us, or at least to stay with us all of today and give us the advantage of your knowledge?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yep! Come on and let's worm up to them hills and then slant clean cut for Kearney. It's longer but it's safer."

"I prefer the river bed; there's water for the stock here, and we have some concealment from any bands that are moving. I don't see that the Indians intend to attack us, unless we go farther into the north."

"Injuns don't advertise, brother"; Spittin' Bill advised; "they fight! And right now they're carrying gilt-edged hell to you and you don't know it. Get on them bluffs before the two bands get together. We got time."

"Will you join us and act under my orders?" The query was curt.

"Hell, yes!" Bill agreed. "String them boys out and put them horses to the trot. If we can make Broken Wheel by five

o'clock, maybe we can get through! If it's the bottom you want, I'll ride it!"

The column started ahead at a fast rate and Spittin' Bill rode beside the first sergeant and spoke of friends they knew in Laramie, Julesberg and Kearney. The afternoon passed quickly. Wagon Wheel was still some eight miles ahead when, as the men were winding through the sand of the river-bed, one of them was struck by an arrow, which went through his left arm. No foe was seen.

Spittin' Bill hurried to the commander and told him to swing his men to the high ground on the left; the lieutenant refused. He ordered the gallop, and the troop tore through the willows at the best speed left in the animals.

Suddenly from all sides, on the higher ground, there appeared the bedecked forms of riding Indians; a column of savages closed the gap to the left, and for an hour the cavalrymen hurried in constant sight of the following Indians.

Spittin' Bill rode leg to leg with the officer, and under his breath, from time to time, he muttered, "The dern young fool—the dern young fool. All hell couldn't stop him now."

Entrenchments were made before sundown and a severe rifle fire was maintained all that night. When dawn came three troopers had been killed and seven wounded; the Indians had charged twice, immediately after sunrise, and had been driven back. The bodies of the horses were like pincushions—full of arrows.

THAT afternoon Richard Comstock squatted behind his men, an eye peering over the rim of the sand, and directed their fire in a resolute and careful manner; and he whittled. One stick after another was cut to pieces by the long blade of his knife. Just before supper, which the top sergeant cooked, the commander was wounded in the thigh. Spittin' Bill cut out the arrow and staunched the flow of blood. Comstock whittled as Bill slashed.

The night wore on. More men were wounded and several were killed. Day broke and twenty effectives were all that remained. Lieutenant Comstock still directed the fire; he was propped and raised, and an eye was cocked toward the enemy. His handsome head, with its jaunty cap, was an excellent target; his nerve was sublime.

Spittin' Bill crawled over and asked him to lie down.

"No, Bill," he said; "I've made a sort of fool out of myself, and I reckon I'll keep on. It won't be long now. Don't worry over me."

"What's your name, your first name " asked Bill.

"They call me Dick at home, my people."

"Well, they sired a man when they foaled you. Here, want another stick? You're sure one whittlin' fool."

Bill gave Comstock a piece of driftwood; then he crept back to the top-sergeant.

"He ain't hell for knowin' the soldier business," he said, "but he sure has guts. Look at him! Ain't he old Whittlin' Dick?"

That name the top sergeant stored away and brought out when he got back to barracks, and it stuck to Comstock till his dying day.

When the sergeant, five troopers, Spittin' Bill and Comstock were all that were able to sit up, Spittin' sought the officer and told him he intended to crawl through the Indian lines that night and go for help.

The parting between the men and the young scout was an affecting scene; two tough old soldiers actually wept. Lieutenant Comstock clutched Bill's hand and wished him luck.

"How old are you, Bill?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

"Well, if you don't get back, where will I send word to your mother or father of the bravery you've shown here?"

"I reckon you needn't bother about that, Lieutenant. I don't happen to have ary mother or father 'cause of these damn Injuns; and, besides, if I don't get through, you won't be sendin' out much. You'll be wrestlin' your hash in hell or squawkin' a hymn in the shade of heaven. But save a cat'ridge if they come over. See?"

Bill had ordered a constant rifle fire, for the first thirty minutes after his departure, to cover any slight sound he might make as he crawled through the dark, along the pebbles of the dry bed. And his comrades obeyed, for an hour; even to the waste of the precious ammunition.

The day broke and the hot sun poured in a torrent upon the besieged men. The first mule meat was boiled that day, pack animal that had been the last beast to die.

That night the officer's wound became gangrenous. The stench from the Indians

who had been killed in their futile assault and had fallen so close to the entrenchments that their brothers dared not recover their bodies, now became an intolerable thing; on the morrow this would be added to by the corpses of the animals. The wounded were at times raving; their cries often being stifled by the hands of their brothers-in-arms, to keep such sounds from the listening redskins.

Another day came and went. The dawn of the third broke when one of the lookouts reported a movement of the enemy out of the river bed to the bluffs a half mile away. Soon a long column stretched up into the hills and then, from the opposite shore, there drifted the glad sharp sound of a bugle and Donegan's troopers burst into view, tearing toward the river at a mad-cap speed. At their head was Spittin' Bill, riding stiff-legged in his stirrups.

He stood and held Comstock's hand as a surgeon dressed the officer's wound; and he was one of the men who carried the litter to the ambulance which had trailed the relief—the relief which he had diverted as it moved on another mission far to the west. That night the return to Kearney started.

When Comstock was able to sit up he called his top sergeant and asked, "Where's Spittin' Bill?"

"Why, he high-tailed it for the Platte the next afternoon after he got Donegan's boys to us. The funny part was that nothing could persuade him to come on in here. He said to tell you that if he could ever help you any way, to send word anywhere up on the north fork of the Platte. I think, Lieutenant, you made a great impression on that boy, and I for one would like to see him brought in here and sent to the post school, this winter."

"I'll never forget him, Sergeant. And I'll get even with him if it takes me a lifetime. Lord, how he could squirt!"

THE opening of the Cherokee Strip! Free land for homesteaders! At last it had come!

All along an imaginary line were men and women, covered wagons, horses, fast saddle horses, old plugs, dogs and broncs; and the nondescript of all the states. Tent towns flourished at various points; and here, above all else, waved the flag of the United States, on the other side of the imaginary line.

Such raucous noise; such horrible looking creatures; such gaunt wild eyes; such sunken cheeks and hungry looking mouths, and lips that always worked, like the hands and feet and legs. Fat marshals, paid by the Revenue Department, moved here and there. And state police—yes, and St. Louis had Sam Allerton down to see that none of the Kerry Patch boys, wanted by the chief, slipped over with the mob and lost their names.

Millions of acres of Indian lands would be thrown open to entry the next day and thousands were waiting for the cannon to belch forth the hour set—high noon.

"Got a pistol and a dirk and the brass-knucks, too,
Gwine to wander long the river,
With my weepons in my hand.
Gwine to kill a yaller nigger just as shore
as y'u is born,
An' hide him in the Mississippi sand."

The song came out of Al Tierney's Exchange and above its canvas-front one saw these words. "We'll be in Perry serving you tomorrow night." They said the singer was a professional, who intended opening a theater at Perry. Men stopped, moved closer, listened and smiled. The sentry walking post number one leaned on his carbine.

Bowieee!

From far down the line, where the yellow lights hung, there rang the sound of a 45-70; it barked heavily in the cool air of the night. The song was never finished. Bedlam!

"Sooners! Sooners! Sooners!"

The cry came from everywhere. The resting sentry walked his post stolidly; cavalry troopers dashed by, sabers jangling. They had work to do, now; someone had dashed across the line.

Then a thin, pinched-faced young man, with a furtive look in his eyes, which were like kidney-beans stuck under his brows, suddenly stepped out of the dark and lit a coal-oil torch. The illumination revealed a small board held in place by a slender-legged tripod. The young man began a ballyhoo; his voice was sharp, but it carried pleasantly and it stopped the moving throng.

"Here it is, boys! Over this way! Look! Look! Look!

The old regular army game! Played on every border since man went to movin'! The little pea an' the shell! The hand is quicker'n the eye—an' then some! Che-

rokee Strip Croquet, fellas! Thirty to one is the odds!"

A big man moved to the little board and a crowd gathered.

On down the line an old man stood before a land-office map stretched upon the face of a building. Above it was attached a large lamp with a tin reflector behind it. The old man peered for a long time at the dim lines and faint numbers; then he smiled and moved away. He seemed to fumble at his beard.

He was dressed in overalls, and a buckskin coat with four-inch fringe down its front and around its bottom edge. His white hair fell about his shoulders. In his hand he carried a Winchester carbine and a long black six-gun barrel showed ominously from beneath the coat. His eyes swept the street—the street where, even now, the long, thick prairie grass grew; they roved to Tierney's, lingered over the shell-man, swept across to the guard-tent where the lounging soldiers were gathered. Then he turned away and disappeared.

A mile from the line the tall figure came out of some willow clumps, and approached a tall, rangy, thin-limbed thoroughbred. The horse nickered.

"Now, John, old-timer, don't y'u throw me down," the old fellow said kindly. "If ever y'u picked up them feet, do it this time. We'll show these slick-ears a hoss that is a hoss. Just a dash, my baby. Not an eighth, an' we're into the shadows an' gone. Come on!"

The old man untied the racer, stepped into a stirrup and moved away from the willows toward the very center of the yellow glare. He edged in among the people watching the shell-game. He saw the sentries fifty feet away meeting and walking and meeting again; and beyond these the trooper videttes. Rookies! Yellowlegs!

"Huh!" he mused as he noted that the cavalrymen were dismounting before a tent. An officer had called them and was reading some recently arrived communication. "Right into my paw!" he added.

At the sight, he guided his horse slowly through the mob, glanced at a parcel tied behind his saddle, saw that the carbine was just right in the boot beneath his left leg. As he rode within fifteen feet of the whitewashed streak on the grass, he quickly stared at the troopers, then at the receding forms of the infantry sentinels, and without hesitation touched his horse and struck directly between the rows of tents.

That dash was so swift and yet so silent that horse and man were opposite the guard-tent before their flight was seen. Then a sharp command was heard; a leg slapped a saddle; carbines were jerked out of the down-hanging gun-scabbards suspended from the McClelland saddles of the troopers. But the pair had gone.

Between the last two tents, the rider had swerved and, jumping the great gelding, he had cleared the guy-ropes and was free. On he raced and behind him, in a vain flight, followed the cavalrymen; followed in a course which led them farther from their quarry with every leap. The black pall of the night had swallowed the "sooner."

After a while the pursuit was abandoned.

"Did you get a squint?" asked the officer when they returned.

"No. Only he had whiskers," said one.

"Notify the second line. Quick, you men!"

OUT on the rolling plain the gelding tore through the dark as though a fiend of fear were on its trail; it raced in a long even stride, and with a lope that carried it along at unbelievable speed. Gradually the rider reined it by the neck in a wide semi-circle that would bring him out somewhere near Section 25 in a certain township and range and allow him to get staked and on his way to the recording office before the crack of the cannon that would send the mob like ants over that long, long border.

Twice he turned and gazed on his backtrail, and twice he laughed in his beard.

"It was not a thing to be sneezed at," he meditated. "Tearin' down a company-street when any one of them hombres might have salivated me."

Once more he stared from his saddle and saw the small cluster of lights where Al Tierney's Exchange was the center. Then he saw a sight which made his old heart pound.

Straight in the air, with a long tail of fire following it, he saw a rocket. It burst, and was pursued by another.

"Be the odds what they might, by gorry, I stick to the way I'm a-goin'," he said. "They've got to slug me, if they stop me!"

On he went. After an hour had put ten miles behind him, he slowed down his horse to a walk; he was filled with a sense of security and mumbled little exultant noises deep in his tanned throat. Of a sudden out of the stillness, directly ahead, came a challenge, "Halt!"

The old man stopped his horse and laughed.

"Come on, boys, I was just a-tryin' to get an old man's bit before the rush began," he called.

"Advance!"

He went forward. Two troopers trotted beside him and one of these searched him and removed his firearms; then they took the reins from his hands and led him away. In half an hour they stopped beside another cluster of tents.

Here he was dismounted and shoved inside a tent; his horse was tied outside; a sentry posted at the front. After a while an officer came, an officer straight as an arrow with the eye of an eagle and a beautifully formed small gray mustache. He peered at the old form huddled over a camp-stool, head in hands.

Then he asked that the prisoner's saddlebags and other personal things be brought to the tent. The order was obeyed. Just as the sentry was on the point of leaving the tent the old man raised a smiling face.

"Say, soldier, if you got any flat- hammered, unchawed chawing terbaccer, gimme a chaw, will you?" he asked.

The private extended a plug; the old man cut off a slice and muttered his thanks. After a moment, with the officer's eyes looking steadily into his, he spat. Spat with a wild abandon!

At that instant, from the outside, there came a rush of hoofs.

"Where's the colonel?" a voice called loudly through the quiet of the spot.

"There," a sentry answered, and pointed to the tent.

A dust-covered courier stuck his head inside the flap.

"Orders, Colonel, from General King with his compliments, sir!"

"Come in!"

The courier entered and, giving the officer a message, stood off at attention. The old prisoner watched the grim face of the man before him as the officer peered at the paper.

Then the colonel shouted to the sentry, "Call Lieutenant O'Neill!"

The sentry called the name to a mounted man and a horse was heard galloping and a name was shouted in a diminishing note. After a few moments a young lieutenant entered the tent and saluted the colonel, who seemed wrapped in great indecision.

"Take all the men we have and report to General King down at Four Mile," he said. "There's trouble over that way between Indians and the stampeders." He was holding the prisoner's eyes.

"All the men, sir?" asked the young soldier.

"All."

"But this prisoner, sir?"

"I'll see to him. Gregory will be here any minute and I'll send this man back with him."

"Yes, sir."

The lieutenant withdrew.

"May I go, sir?" asked the courier.

"My compliments to General King, and tell him forty men are following you."

"Yes, sir!"

A bugle sounded. There came the clatter of mounting men and the stampeding of hoofs; and after a while the sound of wheeling horses and a distant and muffled command. Then the note of the gallop died away in an echo.

The colonel looked at the prisoner before him and spoke but one word.

"Spit!"

The calm prisoner obeyed—with an astounding expertness.

The colonel laid back his head and laughed long and loud.

"Now haven't you raised hell and thrown the chunk inside?" he said.

"Well, sir," began the old man, "I've done my living best for this country. Open that parcel at your feet and I'll show you what I mean."

The colonel obeyed and took from the package, concealed beneath a pair of shirts and some underwear, a mass of leathery, hair-covered objects; he dropped the things to the earth.

"Them," continued the old man, "is what I've kept. But I've got a heap more'n them, in my time."

"What are they?" the colonel asked suspiciously.

"Scalps! Ogallala Sioux, Arapahoes, Blackfeet, Pawnee, Ute and Piute—there's thirty there. Receipts from Injuns!"

"Wait a minute!" the colonel cut in. "Now scalp yourself! Jerk off those whiskers, they're not fitting well when you chew!"

The old man laughed and removed a false beard and flung it into an open Sibley stove, where it flamed to ashes as he looked.

"Now, old-timer," said the colonel, "I've got you. Your name is Wharton, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir! Bill Wharton!"

"Fought as a scout with Colonel Kellogg against the Blackfeet and Nez Perces?"

"Yep!" the old fellow admitted.

"What made you turn sooner?"

"Figured I'd like a slice of this prairie; figured the old U. S. owed me something easy for my old age. Got tired of them hills out yonder. Too many men just like me. Too many women running ranches; too many school teachers turned trappers; beaver all gone; bear going higher up all the time; buffalo gone; all my old pals wintering snug in dugouts, three by six; no children; no woman—except an old blind squaw, and the reservation-agent grabbed her. I'm called a sooner, but, shucks, that ain't my name. I oughta be nicknamed 'Nearly.' This is the first time in my life I was ever in on a good thing *soon!* What'll I get? Ten year?"

"Do you remember riding along the bluffs of a river one summer day and seeing a troop of cavalry just where it should not have been? Think back. It was almost thirty years."

"Yes, sir!" The old fellow brightened. "That was Whittlin' Dick's first, sure-enough command, they said. I've sure grown gray and old, since then."

"Remember that, do you, Wharton?"

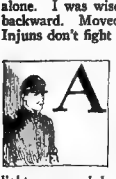
"Yes! And them boys fought them Injuns ragged. Fought 'em and slapped 'em and tromped on 'em and that Dick—Colonel, he just squatted ag'in' a prop and told us how we was a-hitting. I kin hear him now, sometimes; he had a sorta mellow, low voice, and it carried, I tell you. He'd say, 'Riley, that last one was high. Keep 'em low, men. It puts the fear-of-God in 'em if they see 'em strike.' He was a nervy fellow. Young, too. Most too young, maybe."

"How old were you?"

"Seventeen!"

"And you were riding that Indian infested country alone, weren't you?"

"Well, in them days a fellow was better off, if he knew his beans, when he was alone. I was wise to Injuns. Knew 'em backward. Moved at night; lay up days. Injuns don't fight nights!"



A MIST seemed to gather before the colonel's eyes as he looked into the square front of the stove-door. At last he roused to the tune of the old man's *sput-sput-sput!* And a strange light arose and danced in his eyes.

"Here!" he said quickly. "Pack up those cursed scalps and get out of here. Your horse is outside this tent and you'll have to hurry. Where were you going? Did you know?"

"Section 25, Township 3, Range——"

The officer broke in on the description. "Near Big Spring?" he asked.

"Yes, that was the water I was after," the old-timer agreed. "Old Bill Tilghman, wrote me where to go. Didja know Tilghman? From up at Dodge?"

"No, but when you leave here head down that draw to your left and keep going down it for two miles. Then swing to the right, a mile, till you come to a big wash. Turn left here and follow the wash till you come to the spring. Stick up your stake and hide out in those hills, a mile east, till it's time to light out for Perry. I'll be there on the first train that comes through and I'll see that you get recorded."

"But—won't you catch hell for this? It's mighty fine, but——"

"But the deuce! You hit the prairie, old man, and do as I tell you. I know you! Don't think I don't! You're Spittin' Bill, and your eyes are gone. I've been laying for you for thirty years——"

"Do you mean, that you're——"

The colonel picked up a stick of firewood and began to whittle it.

"God!" said the sooner. "Whittlin' Dick, and you haven't changed that stroke in thirty years!"

"No, nor you that dull crack in that squirt of yours. Get out and get going. I'll see you tomorrow."

Spittin' Bill gazed at the erect form before him; reached out a hand and clasped another, ducked under the flap and was gone. His eyes were wet.

Colonel Richard Comstock dropped back to a stool and stared directly into the stove where the wire frame of the sooner's make-believe beard glowed a dull, rich red. Across Whittlin' Dick's face lay a deep calm.

Then, as he heard a hurry of hoofs, he smiled.

"He scratched my back," he said, "and now I've scratched his. If I don't tell the Secretary of War this, when I go to Washington, it will be because he won't listen. I'll show that old spitting fool."

Outside the frogs were jug-a-rumming in a stagnant pool.

THE LANDSMAN SERVES A GUN

By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

The ruthless press gang took no account of youth or infirmity, paid no heed to personal woes—could a man stand he filled a place in the king's ships and sailed out to meet the Dutch

HERE were my brother and I, come all the way from Massachusetts Colony to London with never a mishap, and now as we made our way through one of the dark, stench-filled burrows these London folk of King Charles II call a street, a gentleman of the road halted us with leveled pistol.

"Stand and deliver!" he cried, as he stepped out of the shadow, for all the world as if he were on the broad highway.

My brother's stout stick struck fire from a stone against which he thrust as he took a firmer grip. He recoiled never an inch, for he is a brave man, is my brother. But I, who am not of stout heart, stepped before him, between him and the pistol. For my brother is blind.

"May it please you," I began in a shaking voice, while a beam of moonlight flashed from the silver mounting of the pistol into my staring eyes and set me further trembling.

"Your purses—quick, clods!" the highwayman interrupted in the smooth voice of a lord. A fringe of lace showed around the wrist of his pistol arm. "Quick, or you die!"

The hand of my brother had me by the shoulder. He fears death little. I braced myself but he was too strong for me. In an instant he would have had me aside that he might spring at the voice of the highwayman.

Then over my head the fastenings of a window grated and we stood, frozen, waiting.

"Make no sound," the gentleman robber warned softly, "or I fire." He waited alertly. Then into the darkness someone flung through the window the contents of a bucket of slops.

Full upon the head of our fine highwayman it fell. As the window swung shut again, he uttered an exclamation of measureless disgust and fled down the street.

My brother Samuel and I fell to laughing.

"You see, Stephen," he said, "Providence watches over us. They warned us at home we should never risk the dangers of the sea and of London, but it seems we have survived them both."

"Let us haste to seek lodgings," I answered, "and then on the morrow we search out the chirugeon."

My brother raised up his face and newborn hope was on it. From distant America had we sailed in search of skillful disciples of the healing art who could cure the blind. We had brought hence all our sav-

ings from our farm to offer that they might deign to restore my brother's sight.

"Let us turn away from the waterfront," I urged. "There ruffians gather." We landsmen—my brother and I were born and bred inland—have prejudice against the sea.

We hurried on, I who am slight and was weary from the journey, helped by Samuel, who is strong and lusty and older than I; yet I guided his footsteps. I had been eyes to him the five years since he was smote across the brow in quarterstaff play, and for ten years since we were left orphans had he been father, mother and all in caring for me, timid stripling that I am. No finer man treads soil than my brother. I would give my life for him.

Our steps took us further from the river, but my fears did not decrease. Evil report had come to us across the sea of wickedness that began in the court of the king himself and ended in the black deeds of desperate rogues in the mazes of the streets on just such a night as this.

Presently we came upon a goodly tavern, lights streaming from its windows. We who must save our means for the physician might not squander them in such a brave place. None the less, I peered through the windows and beheld a merry company who sat about and smoked long pipes and quaffed and had profitable discussion. Forsooth they must have been great wits. Ever and anon, one would read from a book. Being well schooled, both Samuel and I can do likewise and take great pleasure in it—or rather, he did take pleasure from my reading to him.

But, as we gazed intent, the street filled with clamor, the sound of a pursuit. Three terrified wretches sped past us, flying as if for their lives, and at their heels such a snarling pack of rascals as never have I seen.

One of the pursued spared breath to shriek at us: "The press! The press!"

With that he hurtled on and the crew after him. Clutching Samuel, I shrank back against the tavern, but the light at our backs delivered us over. Some five of the pursuers left off the chase and surrounded us. Their faces were bearded and roughened. About their heads were bound handkerchiefs. Faded coats and short small clothes clad them and in their belts were stuck knives and pistols, while they gripped heavy cudgels.

"More birds for our net!" a leader chuckled. "Come, my hearties; His Majesty's fleet awaits you."

EVEN to our quiet corner of the New World had come terrible rumors of the press gangs; how English frigates, their crews depleted by fierce wars with the Dutch, were manned to strength by no volunteers but by miserable fellows caught and impressed; how the gangs seized, beat and dragged aboard the ships "poor patient laboring men and housekeepers, the lame and the palsied and little children never at sea before." I shuddered and spoke fast into my brother's ear as the gang drew close around us.

"Come quiet, you countrymen," the leader grinned as he caught sight of our clothes. "It will be the easier for you. There is glory to be had in the wars."

Glory? Yes, as fodder for cannon in a senseless quarrel.

Samuel spoke up stoutly.

"Sailors, I am blind," he said simply. "And this, my brother, is a mere boy who leads me and guides me in my darkness. We are left alone together and have no other kin. What good can the fleet have of such as we?"

So spoke my brother and stood, a figure of quiet dignity, in the light from the tavern.

One took a torch and thrust it at my brother's face.

"He speaks sooth," the torchman grumbled. "A pity, for he is a fine strapping ox. But come, you other. Come, boy. The fleet is manned with worse than you. Come!"

My brother's pleading was drowned in howls of laughter. Despair was on us.

"I will lead you safe into this tavern, brother, and go, since I must," I groaned at last.

But Samuel bellowed in rage and swept up his stick. Whereat I drew my hunting knife and put my back to his.

The five of the press gang rushed in upon us.

Samuel's stick beat down the cudgels of three who came at him. *Crack! Crack!* It thudded on both sides of the skull of one ruffian before he could leap away, and the fellow went down. As for me, two smote at me contemptuously and somewhat lightly as if they feared to break my young bones. I stepped in between their sticks and they grazed down my shoulders. Then with my hunting knife I cut across the backs of the hands that grasped the sticks

—lightly, for never before had I sought the blood of a man. Yet we who have faced the red savage know something of the knife's use. The two gangmen caterwauled with pain and they, too, sprang back.

"Work toward the door of the tavern, Stephen," Samuel whispered over his shoulder.

I did, he pressing his back against mine to be guided. Once in and the kind gentlemen there would succor us.

But the press gang fathomed our design. They dashed in again to take us. But my brother's whirling staff swept a whistling arc that nigh covered us both, and the point of my knife guarded the gap that was left. At length, the leader drew a cutlass and began to hack at the wood of Samuel's staff, but so cleverly did the staff keep the sword in play that the edge was beat off with glancing parries. My knife slithered against the blade of the man before me and the sound of it turned my very marrow to ice. Frantically, I raised my heavy boot and jabbed the heel against his kneecap and he staggered back with a scream.

But one rogue had stolen in under my brother's guard. Sightless eyes were too great a handicap. A thud, sickening and dull, followed. Poor Samuel's great shoulders sagged back against me and I was born down under his body. Heavy hands wound rope around me. They began to drag me off.

"My brother!" I cried. "Don't leave him there to die. He is blind—*blind*, I tell you! Help! You in the tavern there, help!"

But so common were night brawls in London that none came to the door.

One of the gangmen bent over the still form of my brother. When he rose, I saw that he had in his hand the little store of gold we had saved to pay the chirugeons.

"Would you make him blind forever!" I shrieked. "Have mercy! A curse on you! Help! He——"

Then they strangled me into unconsciousness.

IT WAS day when I came to my senses. Immediately I wished I might take leave of them again, for I was being flung about within a great box. To my relief, it was open at one side and I was not, as I had feared at first, buried alive in a coffin. Sick enough from the manhandling I had received, I became sicker yet from the motion which tossed me. At length, my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom and I guessed that I was a prisoner in the dark insides of some manner of ship. Never before my journey from America had I so much as ventured aboard one.

Presently came one and dragged me from the bunk.

"Turn to, pressed man," he growled at me; then looking me up and down. "I cry your pardon—pressed boy. Lord, what scurvy recruits they send us these days. They had better have pressed your nurse."

Laughing at his own wit, the fellow dragged me after him, for my legs would scarce support me. He opened a door off a dark passageway and thrust me through it. I sprawled on the floor.

"There, Master Dickon, is a seasoned gunner for your crew!" he bawled across me to a man who sat on a keg.

The man on the keg regarded me sadly. He shook his head of graying hair, wagging it back and forth so that his rubicund nose swung before my eyes like a fiery pendulum. Then he clapped his lean hands against his lean thighs and swore steadily without repetition for upward of a minute. But there was a look of kindness in the strikingly keen blue eyes he turned upon my slender frame.

"I never thought to see the day," he rumbled, "when England must needs rob cradles to fill her frigates. Sorry times these when the land that shattered the Armada of Spain comes to pressing riffraff and babes to fill the berths of able seamen. Small wonder these clumsy Dutchmen take the wind of us, rake us with their cannon and send us to the bottom. We must have freemen and seamen to conquer. Why did you not follow the sea of your own accord, boy?

"The more fool you, if you did," he growled on, without waiting for me to answer. "What good would you have of it. We stomach food not fit for swine and drink bilge water that the victualers and provisioners and all up to the lords of the fleet may fill their purses. I tell you, boy, their purses are made of good sailormen's bellies. And pay—in arrears or none at all!"

"Is there no reward then?" I asked.

"None save this," Master Dickon answered; "sometimes the Navy chest at Chatham creaks open to pay moneys for the care of seamen wounded in these wars.

But for that, there is nothing."

"Save serving England," said I.

The old master gunner straightened on his powder keg. His blue eyes became even brighter as they dwelt on me. Then he rose and walked the length of the gun deck, bestowing pats on the cannon as if they were alive.

"Aye, boy, save serving England!" he muttered at length.

Thence on, Master Dickon was my patron. Taking me under his especial care, he taught me to know the guns—to elevate their muzzles with the coin, to lay the powder train to their touch-holes, to put the match to it and stand clear. From him I learned to charge with grape-shot, and he made me wise in the precautions of the powder magazine. And he taught me to beware of the gun, wrenched loose from its moorings and rolling about on its truck like a wild beast.

So I had some small skill the day we sighted strange sail, said to be the fleet of that hard-fighting old Dutchman, De Ruyter. I ran to my station on the gun deck of the second tier.

But before we could come into action with them, a tempest which had been brewing smote us.

Those were three days of utter terror for me. I lay below, sick and helpless. Several times came Master Dickon to me, and, once when I thought we were about to sink, I begged him if he survived he would seek out and see if my brother lived. I had told him the story, how last I had seen poor Samuel, crumpled and still before the tavern door in London town.

"Better dead, the blindman," the old fellow mumbled. "Yet if he lives, there is one, Samuel Pepys, a secretary of the Navy," Dickon considered and declared. "An honest man, the report is—a rose among thorns. Could you but gain his ear, all might go well, for they say his own eyesight fails somewhat. He might understand. But he is difficult to come at."

I begged old Dickon to promise to take us to this secretary.

"How should he know me?" he asked, moving away. "Yet, boy, he might know of me. We'll see; we'll see."

When at length I dragged myself up on deck again it was to feel for a third time that strange, unreasoned thrill which had made me blurt of serving England to the master gunner and which had possessed me when we faced the Dutch fleet for battle ere the storm parted us. For the present tempest had cleared and we had sighted a lone Dutch frigate and were preparing to engage her. In spite of the dastard deed done my brother and my own seizure, I was ready to fight to my death for that mastery of the seas which, landsman though I be, I know is the life of my native land.

UPON the second gun deck was a great running to and fro as the gun crews prepared for action, and overhead the pounding of feet and the thump of roundshot being put to hand told that the upper tier, too, was making ready to rake the Dutchman. Powder, sufficient for first needs only, wad and ball were stacked close to each of our twelve and eighteen pounders. I took my station near my gun, which was nearly amidships, and made ready to light the linstock match and hold it for the gunner. Such small service had been given me as my duty, my strength not being deemed sufficient to handle the powder kegs or roundshot.

An officer swung down to oversee the state of preparation of our deck and found Dickon ordering the last shots rammed home against their charges and matches lit. Our broadside waited only the word.

"Ever ready to leap at them, old sea tiger!" he laughed and hailed the master gunner. "But keep those eager matchmen of yours away from the powder. Watch us first outsail the broadpants."

"Flirt with the wind, if you will," growled the master gunner. "Cut a figure or two of a court dance with them. When you grow tired of that, come to me and I'll put you some English iron in their vitals."

The officer laughed louder. "Nay, watch us take the wind of them. This is a duel with none to interfere unless it be old Neptune who begins to beat up the waves again."

In truth the sea began to grow choppy once more.

So we of the gun crews stamped out our matches and crowded to the gun ports to watch the maneuvering of the sailing masters.

It made a goodly show, though one with little meaning to me, a landsman. Back and forth the frigates tacked, ever swifter in the increasing wind and ever drawing nearer. At last the side of the Dutchman bearing on us flamed and was wreathed about with fair, white smoke. Then to our

ears came the crash of cannon and the fearsome whistle of cannon ball so that all we green pressed men ducked our heads hastily within the ports.

"Never fear, lad," the gunner next me grinned. "The Dutch ever fire high to cripple our rigging. We English aim for the heart, not the wings."

Again the order came down to hold fire. And Master Dickon roared with anger, crying he was no whit outranged and, if the captain thought so, let him come to closer quarters.

The frigates tacked on, but soon the volleys of the Dutch frigate had brought low so much of our sail and cordage that she was able to bring a broadside to bear on our bow. Depressing her guns then, she smashed round after round into our forecastle and death came to many of the armed seamen there gathered to board. Their shrieks and groans came down to us. Linstocks in hand, matches sputtering, our gun crews stood wrathy and impatient and at their posts.

An eternity and then came the order, "Fire!" From me, the gunner snatched the linstock and laid fire to the train. Through the touch-hole raced the powder's fire. Claps of thunder and flashes of fire deafened and blinded me, as all the guns of our port side roared.

My own gun leaped and reared like a thing alive, recoiling on its truck to the limit of its moorings. The crew laid hold of the ropes and heaved it back. The loaders were quick to charge it and in a trice it was back in battery again, the gunner laying it full on one of the foe's ports. Lean old Dickon raced the length of the deck like a coursing hound. The word came again, and again our guns thundered.

The Dutchman drew off and shortly the opposite broadsides had their turn. Then the frigates swung about and my side was in action again.

Three volleys as fast as our cheering crews could fire. Next the cry, "More powder!" and a delay. In the heavier seas, the frigates rolled toward one another and the boarders began to muster. Seemingly the wings of both of us had been cut, for we sailed about no more.

We could see the Dutch through their gun ports now as, point-blank, we poured into each other broadside after broadside. A wild elation and a strange strength were on me and I it was who rammed home the charges in place of the gunner who had gone below, his shoulder skewered with a great splinter. Shot ripped through into our deck and horrible screams resounded in my ears. Old Dickon was everywhere, dragging dead men from across their cannon, prying off timbers and putting guns into action again.

Above us the deck was rent by a terrible crash followed by an explosion. One of the enemy's shot had struck a gun in the tier directly above us and exploded a powder keg. We all of us were flung down. Staring up, we saw the heavy cannon half through the splintered deck above, threatening to crush us into pulp. Prostrate in terror, we did not dare move.

Then old Dickon rushed at us, raging. "Up, you poltroons, you street-scum! Was *your* gun hit? Charge and fire!"

Shamed, we served the gun, shoulders hunched and cringing under the mass above. Forward on the deck, a gun had ripped loose and, flying about on its truck with each roll of the ship, had maimed five men ere Dickon overturned it with a spike.

From blood that dripped down from the deck above, we were red from head to foot. Now we and the Dutchman were so close we rolled almost in the same trough of the sea as the wind beat up the ocean into greater sound and fury. In all the tumult of battle it was passing strange that a faint moan a little to my right should have reached my ringing ears. But so it did, and I turned and ran to the side of Master Dickon, down with a cruel slug of iron embedded deep in his breast.

"I'm done, lad," the old fellow muttered. "But we have them. Their fire slackens. If only she strikes her colors while she yet will ride out the storm."

The fading blue eyes looked up into mine.

"Then it's prize money, boy—for you and that brother. Now leave me. Back to your gun!"

I straightened to obey the dying master gunner, but as I rose a Dutch gunner in the opposite port got home a shot at the base of our port. The ball did not enter but through the oaken side it drove the bolts of the breeching of our truck. Like so many iron arrows, they pierced the bodies of my gun mates.

More I can scarce remember. In my frenzy, I worked the next gun alone and fought a desperate duel with the Dutch gunner opposite me. We would hold our fire for that moment when heaving sea would cant the two frigates so that our ports were full in line. Then would we blaze at each other. Three times my powder trains were too long or too short.

Above or below the port of the Dutchman the muzzle of my gun was swung ere the piece discharged. In a like manner, I take no doubt, my life was saved by his miscalculations.

As we swung into line the fourth time, I thrust my sputtering match into the touchhole. Flame seemed to stream across into the Dutchman's port and on and on until the whole ship was rent with a blinding blast that seared my eyeballs and smote me to the deck.

NO PRIZE money," a shipmate answered my anxious question when I had recovered somewhat on our homeward voyage. "No, not a shilling. One of our gunners put a shot into the Dutchman's powder magazine and sank him."

No money to cure my brother's blindness, if yet he lived. Black despair seized on me. Helpless again. Nothing before us but weary years of saving again a chirugeon's fee. And I less aid to Samuel than before, for the blast had brought harm to my own eyes and my vision grew ever fainter.

"In high time was that last shot," my shipmate was saying. "It was near the Dutchman's day. But never fear, friend. Some portion of pay will be given us and gold from the Navy chest at Chatham will pay for the healing of our hurts."

Those last words were bright in my mind when we made port, when I was discharged and when, God be praised, I found my brother safe, cared for at the tavern before which we had been attacked. They burned in my brain, did those words when, saying naught of my hurt, I guided Samuel to Chatham and counseled him that he should represent to the skillful chirugeons that it was he who had been wounded in a sea fight with the Dutch.

"Is it fair?" quoth I, echoing Samuel's question. "Fair?" And I swore one of the round sea oaths I had learned. "Was it fair for a press gang to strike you down and rob you? Come."

So he went with me and he never noted my hesitancy nor knew that his brother's face was powder-burned and his eyes dimmed. Finally we came to Chatham and I drew aside and gave the clerks the name, "S. Ackers," which might be either Samuel or me, Stephen. There was some delay, for a party of persons great in the affairs of the fleet had come to inspect and made all distrait. But at length came one with my frigate's muster roll, calling out that S. Ackers was wounded in the service of the king and was deserving to have his hurts healed and to be cared for from the moneys of the royal chest.

It was then that I pushed Samuel forward. Tears were in my smarting eyes, but my brother could not see them. As I urged him on and in, I sat myself down to wait and stare about at the beautiful world, the sight of which might not be for many more days before my eyes. I did not, I must not, care, if only my brother could see.

But then a numbskull shipmate of mine, wounded with me, hailed me by name and asked after my hurts.

"Another Ackers!" suspiciously cried a clerk at the door, scanning the list. "There are not two set down."

Alas! All the stucture of my little plot tumbled. Up strode a fine gentleman, mighty in the control of the fleet, from the deference paid him.

"What trickery is this?" he demanded. There was naught for it then but to tell him. Nothing left but blindness for us both and mayhap prison.

The gentleman heard out my halting tale.

"Let the chirugeons take them both and treat them with their utmost skill," said he then. "There is that which is even more heroic than serving a gun against England's enemies."

When my good brother and I, sight promised us, came rejoicing from the hands of the chirugeons, our benefactor was departing. As we watched, he got into a coach with two fair ladies. But we hastened up to ask the name of him to whom we were so greatly beholden.

"Samuel Pepys," he said.

OSAGE ORANGE

THE Osage orange, which takes its name from the Osage Indians, was called *bois d'arc*, "bow-wood," by the French, because of its use for making bows by all the Indians to whom it was accessible. It was especially common in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas. These mountains, incidentally, received their name from a French post known as *Aux Arcs*, about the present Arkansas Post, Arkansas.—F. W. H.

THE LEGIONAIRE

By J. D. NEWSOM

Tough, hard, vicious and deadly is the Foreign Legion patroling frontier Morocco; toughest and hardest of the Legion was the disciplinary company of Souk el Mara; and worst of that choice company was Buck Brayley—yet old ibn Tagazzi knows that only once in a lifetime will he meet such a fighter

SINCE Souk el Mara first became a halting place for the caravans on their journey from the Niger northward to the Atlas, the inhabitants of the oasis have been petty robbers and petty traders, who, for gain, would sell their first-born or murder their own father. The place has drawn to itself the scum of North Africa, the worst elements of every race and creed. Arab and Moor in flowing burnous and *djellaba*, naked Bantu, black Jew, Mohammedan, Christian and pagan, they jostle and quarrel and shout in the narrow bazaar and the open square.

On the west side of the square, in sharp contrast to the mud-walled, windowless, crumbling, native houses, stand the barracks, glaring-white, spotless and modern. A squadron of *spahis*, two companies of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and a company—a disciplinary company—of the Foreign Legion, are there to keep the trade routes open and the rabble in order.

But the people of Souk el Mara have seen ruler after ruler come their way. To each in turn they have paid tribute and fawned upon and, when the occasion permitted, knifed in the back.

Today the French hold sway. Tomorrow?

Yet there is one power with which these people do not tamper—that of the Tuaregs. It is better, they know, to lie to the French and have peace than to fall foul of the Tuaregs and die. And if the desert warriors choose from time to time to raid a caravan and carry off a score of camel boys, it is wise and expedient to make no outcry, for the French have declared that the slave trade has been stamped out. They should know; have they not proclaimed themselves overlords of the desert? And who would contradict the word of the overlords?

So it is that the tricolor of France flies above Souk el Mara and French soldiers mount guard before the barrack gate, while the real rulers keep out of sight behind the shifting sand dunes of the desert, and their word, in the desert, is law.

One man and one man only ever had the temerity to defy the Tuaregs—Yacub Yar Fedjeb, paunchy, pompous, self-important Yacub Yar Fedjeb.

He lived in Algiers, where he was not

without friends, and when ten of his Fulah camel boys were whisked away to wear neck chains, he betook himself to the office of the Governor-Général and politely said insolent things about the efficiency of the service.

Thereafter, Mohiuddin ibn Tagazzi, the Tuareg, found himself most unpleasantly harried half-way across North Africa and all the way back again before he could shake off the soldiers sent out to capture or kill him. Taken by surprise, it cost him half his harem, the lives of fifty odd men, a year's loot, and it utterly disorganized his regular business. When the chase became wearisome he fled with a handful of followers—and disappeared.

His pursuers at last went home to nurse their own wounds, for ibn Tagazzi fought as he ran, and they officially reported him as having been disposed of, "the last of the great slave raiders."

Fat old Yacub Yar Fedjeb's self-importance became greater than ever: could he not start a war with one little word, a mere nod of his head? So, to crow over his less influential rivals, he left Algiers and began a tour of inspection of his string of shops and factories, scattered wherever trade was good—a thing he had not done for many years.

In time he reached Souk el Mara, furtive, dangerous Souk el Mara of the narrow streets and blind alleys. Here, from the lips of his assistant he heard news which made his loose mouth twitch and his heart beat uncommonly fast.

"It is said, O *Sidi*," explained the assistant, "that the son of ibn Tagazzi came last night to this city, and it is said that he is here—he is here——"

Yacub Yar Fedjeb tried hard to laugh.

"*Allah Kerim!* What old woman's story is this? Ibn Tagazzi is hiding in the Soudan somewhere. It is well known. He dare not come back. The French broke him."

"*Sidi*—my brother, with his own eyes, saw the Tuareg."

"Then thy brother is mad and a fool, I tell you!"

"But the Tuareg, *Sidi*, walked straight up to my brother—it was in the market place, within sight of the French sentry—and he said: 'It is known to me that Yacub Yar Fedjeb will be here tomorrow. Tell him that I shall cut his tongue out of his mouth.' And my brother—there was a knife against his ribs—dare not shout nor move, but he saw clearly that it was ibn Tagazzi's son by the bullet scar he has above the right eye."

Then Yacub Yar Fedjeb wished devoutly that he were back again in Algiers where there was comfort and safety. He realized quite vividly how easy it would be for the Tuareg to stab him as he walked through the crowded streets, and he knew from experience that there would not be one witness to say who had struck him down. He was cornered. For a moment panic gripped at his throat and his self-complacency deserted him.

IT WAS four o'clock in the afternoon. He must reach safety before dark, or spend the night cowering against a wall, waiting for the killer. His servants were not to be trusted; no, not even his assistant, who now stood before him and addressed him with so much deference.

Suddenly it occurred to Yacub Yar Fedjeb that even here in this isolated place there was one white man who would help him, and that man was Lieutenant Dubronier, whose notes of hand he held for considerable sums of money. Moreover, the young officer had been connected with a certain scandal, involving a native lady, which had been carefully hushed up.

Yacub Yar Fedjeb knew every little detail, however, and knew also that a single word dropped in the right place would mean the end of a promising career.

Quickly he called for ink and paper and scrawled a note to his friend, writing in French to avoid all possible delay:

Yacub Yar Fedjeb sends greetings and begs to advise you that he finds himself in an awkward predicament, due to the presence in Souk el Mara of many enemies. In exchange for your immediate help he will return to you certain documents which now repose in an Algiers safe.

Come! Come quickly! Come at once, and Yacub Yar Fedjeb will prove that his gratitude is not a word without meaning. And he will put Lieutenant Dubronier in possession of information concerning the presence in the oasis of enemies of France! Come, I beg you, and the shadow of Lella Nefisso need no longer oppress you!

"Take this to Lieutenant Dubronier," he told his assistant. "Place it in his own hands. Go quickly!"

Half an hour later the assistant was back

again. His face was ashen gray and his hands shook.

"*Sidi*," he babbled hysterically. "*Sidi*, have mercy! As I reached the market-place I was pressed against the wall by three men, and one held a pistol against my ribs—it was hidden beneath his burnous—and another took thy note from me! He read it and laughed and said: 'Go back to thy master and tell him that when his time comes he shall die, and that neither his gods nor the French can save him when I choose to end his life.'"

Yacub Yar Fedjeb lost all control of himself and he beat his assistant with podgy fists, ending up with kicks when the man fell to the floor.

"Son of a hundred fathers," he cried. "Thou filth! I——"

Threats sputtered to his lips, but he knew they were useless. He relented, not wishing to spend the night with yet another enemy sleeping beneath the same roof.

"Get up," he ordered. "Now that thou knowest the weight of my hand, obey! Run to the barracks and raise an alarm!"

"They said," wailed the assistant, "that my life would be forfeit if before morning I left this shop."

"And I command——"

"*Sidi, Sidi*, wait! By the door of the Café des Palmiers I saw a soldier. He is standing there, doing nothing. Staring. A big man, a strong one. It is not far to the Café des Palmiers, *Sidi!* Thou couldst run to him with swiftness and tell him to take thee to the officer. For ten francs he——"

"*Aie!* But suppose he is no longer there?"

"I shall see. Wait, *Sidi!* From the roof it is easy to make sure. From the roof, by leaning out a little."

The soldier still lounged by the café door. In his ill-fitting uniform of olive-drab khaki drill, with his *képi* pulled down over one eye, he stood out in sharp contrast to the crowd which swirled past him.

The glaring, raw-white desert sun beat down on naked black bodies, on flowing *djellabas*, on women muffled in raven *tchartchaffs*, on green turbans, and shaven heads, on laden camels and donkeys, on the stalls of the vendors of spiced breads and sweetmeats where the flies were thick, but all this mob gave the soldier a very wide berth.

For a long time Yacub Yar Fedjeb's eyes traveled from the soldier to the crowd where the Tuareg lurked and back again. At last he made up his mind.

"It is well," he said importantly. "I shall order that man to take me to his officer. And watch well, thou shameless one, how Yacub Yar Fedjeb deals with dirty Touregs."

He crossed the store, watched the crowd for a second or so through a slit in the awning and, steeling himself, all at once hurried out into the open toward the Café des Palmiers.

BUCK BRAYLEY, soldier of second class, first company, third battalion, Foreign Legion, shifted his weight from his right foot to the left and fluently cursed his luck.

In the course of one afternoon he had consumed far more bad liquor than is good for any one man to drink. He had imbibed stale, warm beer, thin, bitter Spanish wine, an abomination called cognac, and one drink which the proprietor of the café swore was whisky and tasted of methylated spirits. And now Brayley had no more money, although his throat was still parched and dust-coated.

As he leaned against the wall he wondered whether it would be worth while beating up the proprietor and helping himself free of charge to the stuff.

He was not a prepossessing soldier, this Buck Brayley. He was tall and rawboned and tough. Out of the sleeves of his undersized tunic stuck great hands, and his shoulders distended the cloth until it seemed ready to rip open if he took a deep breath.

His face was harsh, bitter, grooved with deep lines; his mouth was drawn tight as a string beneath the ragged mustache, and behind his eyes lurked a brooding devil of discontent.

Once, five years before, he had been known to New York's cops as a tough proposition, a Houston Street gangster, a gunman, but they could hang nothing on him until—until like a fool he fell for Angelina Buffanti, and she helped the cops to frame him.

Then in a rage he shot to kill, dropped three dicks, and escaped down tenement passages. By devious ways he reached Europe, only to find that over there, too, they were watching for him. Hearing of the Legion, he went to Toulon and enlisted, a matter of hours before the local police succeeded in tracking him down.

By that time, however, he was safe, and

he laughed at his pursuers from the deck of the transport which carried him across to Africa.

"When I'm good and ready," he told himself, "I'll beat it. No damn Alphonse is gonna keep me with this outfit if I don't want to stay. When the dust settles I'll beat it back to N'Yawk."

That was five years before. The Legion asks no questions of its recruits; it offers them a safe asylum—but it boils on to them with a grip of steel. Its business is war, and its watchword is efficiency. Its raw material is poor at best, but it takes it and molds it ruthlessly; what it cannot mold it breaks.

Buck Brayley soon tired of the game. He tried to desert, was caught, sent to prison, a military prison where they know how to handle hard cases. Thereafter, dimly, Brayley began to understand that he could not fight against the machine which had made him a part of itself.

He grew sullen, dangerous. He fought and he drank and he was dirty. He acquired the reputation of being the worst soldier unshot in the Legion, which he undoubtedly was. He obeyed orders grudgingly; not with the snap and swing which is the hall-mark of the Legionaire. At last, to cap a series of minor offenses, he sold his equipment, all but his side-arms and rifle, to a native for the price of a bottle of wine.

The court-martial sentenced him to a year with the disciplinary company at Souk el Mara. For the first six months he was not allowed out of barracks and at last the machine wore down his will to resist. Automatically he obeyed orders; he no longer snarled at the non-coms; he kept his uniform clean.

But his evil reputation clung to him like a leech. He was a marked man, the target of every officer's displeasure, of every non-com's curses.

Then came the day when he was granted his first pass, and he spent his time at the Café des Palmiers, drinking rotten liquor.

He spat dust out of his mouth and shifted his position a little.

Five years he'd been with this bunch of Frogs. By this time he was probably forgotten by the crowd at Donovan's. Nobody'd know him. No, he didn't want to go back after all. The cops would get him. It made him very sad. He was an outcast, damned and doomed to spend the rest of his life rotting away slowly in the middle of the desert. The only thing he could do was to have another drink.

As he turned to reenter the café, the proprietor, a vast Maltese, blocked the doorway with a round expanse of belly.

"I'm coming in," said Brayley.

"Ah, but no! Not here! You are not entering my establishment," retorted the Maltese in a high, squeaky voice. "You have not money. You make noise. I report you if you do not go away."

"Aw—one drink. I'll pay next week," argued Brayley.

"*Pfff!* No. Always the same the Legion—pay next week. German, Italian, French, English, and you, Yankee—pay next week. And I say no! Go away!"

"Hell!" said Brayley, unbuckling his belt. "If I don't have that drink I'll rip you open. Get that?"

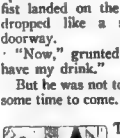
The Maltese had learned his English from the British troops garrisoning his native island, and he made use of four words, which are just as explosive in America as they are in England. He wasn't afraid. Legionaires of the disciplinary company dare not make trouble in Souk el Mara, unless of course they were willing to run the risk of six weeks cells, or worse.

So he used those four words and repeated them shrilly, and the buckle of Brayley's belt smashed into his face and tore open the bulbous nose and fat, quivering cheeks.

Blinded by his own blood, the Maltese opened his mouth to scream. Brayley's fist landed on the side of his jaw. He dropped like a sack and lay in the doorway.

"Now," grunted Brayley, "I guess I'll have my drink."

But he was not to touch whisky for quite some time to come.



AT THE first sign of violence a dense mob had clotted about him, ten deep. Traffic along the narrow way was completely held up. Each second the throng became more dense, and more excited. They cried to each other that the soldier had killed the proprietor of the café. They said he had gone mad and would kill them all. A woman shrieked piercingly, and fists were shaken above the sea of heads.

Men took Allah to witness that there was no justice now that soldiers killed peaceful folk in broad daylight.

Someone dragged the Maltese into the

depths of the café, and the door was slammed in Brayley's face.

He wheeled about, snarling at the crowd. Those nearest him cowered away, only to be driven back, closer than ever to that murderous belt buckle.

Then through the press burst Yacub Yar Fedjeb, his garments in tatters, his face all a-quiver with terror, and behind him dodged a slim figure in a white burnous.

"Soldier!" screeched Yacub Yar Fedjeb. "Ten francs! Ten francs for you if you will take me to the barracks, to my friend the lieutenant! They are trying to kill me!"

But the words tumbled out so incoherently that Brayley mistook the trader's meaning. Here was a damn nigger who was trying to lay hands on him. No damn nigger was going to do that.

He caught Yacub Yar Fedjeb by the throat, whirled him around and kicked him with the toe of his steel-shod boot.

"Get out," he snapped, "or I'll break your damn neck!"

Yacub Yar Fedjeb, no longer pompous and self-important, tried to plead his case, but he caught sight all at once of the man in the white burnous, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

Despair, however, made him brave.

"Tuareg!" he yelled, pointing with both hands at his pursuer. "Tuareg!"

The crowd, momentarily forgetting the soldier, shuddered and gaped at the white-clad figure. Here, in their midst, was a desert prowler, no longer a lurking terror to be feared and propitiated, but a living, palpable creature—ready to be torn to pieces. Were they not there in their hundreds; was he not alone?

So their cries redoubled and missiles began to fly.

A shadow of a grin spread over Brayley's face as he watched the people of Souk el Mara work themselves up to a frenzy of hatred. He understood not a word of what was said, but it was only too patent that the Tuareg was going to die, and die unafraid. With one hand the Tuareg held Yacub Yar Fedjeb; in the other he gripped a French service revolver.

"Make way, jackals," he cried. "This man goes with me!"

"Kill him!" screamed Yacub Yar Fedjeb. "Kill him!"

Then above the babel of voices rang fresh shouts. A patrol headed by a mounted officer was clearing the roadway, driving the crowd back down the bazaar. Bayonets glinted above the seething mass.

Yacub Yar Fedjeb, twisting out of the Tuareg's grasp, shrieked at sight of the officer, "Lieutenant Dubronier! Help! Quick, quick, qui——"

He died with a bullet in the back of his head.

Then the people of Souk el Mara, at sight of the blood, went mad. They flung themselves upon the Tuareg and drove him against the wall, where fifty hands tried to drag him down and mangle him. And all the time the patrol pushed and shoved and used its gun butts on the bare black feet, jamming the mob more compactly than ever in the narrow street.

Before he was overwhelmed the Tuareg fired four times. He brought down the gun barrel on a fifth man's head as his assailants bore him own.

Ten feet away Buck Brayley was trying to keep on his feet. Kicked, buffeted, beaten, he was wedged in so tightly that he could barely breathe. But he saw the Tuareg go down and all at once a feeling of pity took possession of him—he who had never known pity before in his life.

Here was a man fighting against tremendous odds, a brave man. Murderer? Yes. Thief? No doubt. A dirty nigger, but a lone man, battling against overwhelming odds.

"Damn the patrol," he grunted. "I'll get 'im out of this."

"Get back to the squad!" he heard the officer calling to him.

Instead, he twisted round with a heave and a wrench. He tore his way over squirming bodies and with his fists and feet cleared enough space for the Tuareg to struggle to his feet.

The man's face streamed with blood. *Djellaba* and dust cloth had been torn off him. Somehow he had retained his hold on his double-edged sword, broken halfway down the blade, and he raised it as if to slash at Brayley.

"Beat it!" the latter bellowed. "Keep going!"

The living torrent closed in on them again, and, side by side, staggering, stumbling, cursing, they fought through it. The soldiers, headed by the officer, were driving a wedge in the crowd and drawing nearer at every step to the center of the disturbance.

Through the sweat which blinded his eyes Brayley at last caught sight of an alley blocked by an overturned stall. A narrow gut of an alley, winding away be-

tween high black walls.

"Over!" yelled Brayley. "Climb over!"

The Tuareg caught the meaning of the words.

"You—you come?" he asked thickly.

"No. Hop over!"

Incomprehensible people! Strange, mad white man who stood ready to die to save an enemy of his country! There was no time to argue. The Tuareg leaped the obstacle and sped away, and Brayley stood alone, barring the way.

Down upon him, white-faced, eyes aflame, rode Lieutenant Dubronier.

"Stand clear!" he ordered.

Brayley shook his head.

"That man," he managed to stammer, "attacked—almost killed. I——"

"Disobeyed orders! Helped a murderous Tuareg. You're under arrest. Now stand clear, I'm going to jump!"

The people of Souk el Mara then witnessed an astonishing spectacle.

A soldier, a battered private of the Foreign Legion, a very devil, caught hold of his officer's bridle and forced him back, held him off until the fugitive was out of sight, and by that time the patrol had closed in on the rebel and clubbed him into insensibility.

Souk el Mara is used to disturbances and hysterical riots. This one subsided as if by magic. All in one minute the bazaar emptied and wailing merchants began to salvage their wares from the dusty roadway.

The patrol, cursing without restraint, because their burden was heavy, carted Buck Brayley back to barracks.

"Heavy, is he?" grunted a corporal. "Well, it's the first and last time we'll have to carry him. He'll go to the stake for this, without a doubt. And the sooner the better. Worst man we ever had."

And away off at the other end of the oasis, three men were cresting the first sand ridge, leaving behind the shade of the palm trees, riding toward the east where night was closing in.

"I have heard many strange tales of the foreigners," said the son of ibn Tagazzi, "but never have I heard of such a man as fought beside me today. Mad he was, of course. And he will be shot for his offense, unless—hm—I was forgetting; they always wait and shoot such men in cold blood."

He closed his lips and said no more until he reached a tent pitched in a shadowy gulley where his father, the great Mohiuddin ibn Tagazzi awaited him.

BUCK BRAYLEY lay on his back on the bare boards of the prison bed. Because it was suffocatingly hot in the cell he was stripped down to a dirty gray cinglet and a pair of khaki trousers. Flung in a corner in a heap were his tunic, cap and boots.

There were no laces in the boots, nor did Brayley have either braces nor belt nor handkerchief, because two days before he had been condemned to die at a stated time with his back to a stake, faced by a dozen rifles, and his executioners did not want him to hasten his own departure.

Through the barred window high up in the wall of the cell came the sounds of the African night—the ceaseless, monotonous *thump-thud-thud, thump-thud-thud* of a tomtom; the wailing of women, lamenting from the house-tops the death of one of their kin; palm fronds rustling dryly in the sluggish breeze; the far off squeal of a camel.

Beyond the door which closed the cell, a sentry paced with deliberate tread. From the guard room came the sound of men's voices, punctuated by snores and spasms of coughing. The smell of coffee and the acrid odor of strong tobacco seeped into the cell.

Brayley moved restlessly, for the chinks between the bed planks were alive with vermin, which gave him no peace. He scratched, yawned and sat up.

For a time he sat there, cursing softly, then he arose and kicked at the gate.

"Hi, Sergeant?" he called out. "Can you spare a cigarette?"

A red face with a bristling black mustache appeared at the wicket.

"Cigarette—for you? No. It's against the regulations. You get your cigarette—hm—in the morning with the cognac and the breakfast."

Brayley laughed.

"Against the regulations, eh? What do regulations matter now? Haven't you heard the news?"

"News?"

"Oh, you blockhead, don't you know—I'm to be shot in the morning. For God's sake, give me a smoke and don't look so stupid."

"Blockhead," repeated the sergeant. "Ah, but that is too strong. Never has a soldier yet called me a blockhead!"

"I'm not a soldier, I'm a dead man, so

what's the odds? Come on, how about that cigarette?"

"You demand favors of me, eh?" the sergeant brayed, having fully recovered from the insult. "Learn to be respectful first. Ah, but it is time we were rid of you! Never was there a worse imitation of a soldier. I tell you, you deserve what is coming to you. A disgrace, that is what you are. The regulations say that you get tobacco with your breakfast. We abide by the regulations."

"Regulations be damned!" said Brayley.

The wicket was slammed in his face, and he was left alone in the darkness.

Time trickled by slowly. The cracked bell above the stables struck one o'clock. In the distance the beat of the tomtom still throbbed, blending with the cries of the mourning women.

Brayley paced nervously between the wall and the door.

"Couldn't even give a guy a smoke," he mumbled. "Don't mind dying; it's better than being with this damn bunch of Frogs, but, by hell, I'd give anything for a smoke. I'd like——"

He paused in mid-stride, listening. There was a commotion in the guard room. Some one, a native, was yelling in a terror-stricken voice. Men ran about heavily; a whistle blew. More voices.

That was old Brocart, the military doctor, saying over and over again, "Terrible, terrible, terrible," like a parrot.

Brayley stood facing the door, trying to catch a word here and there. The commotion grew and grew. The officer of the day, Capitain Grinche, was in the guard room now, giving orders.

"Take his deposition here," the doctor's rasping voice cut in. "He can't be moved. He'll be dead in a minute."

"All right, just as you say," bellowed Grinche. "Silence!"

Then a mumble of words, followed by the bleating whine of the native, *"Sidi, Sidi! Toubib——"*

"Sssssssss——"

Brayley whirled, swift as a flash. The hiss had come from behind him, from the grated window. Against the starry patch of sky, loomed something round and bulky —a head.

"Ssss," it came again. "Soldier, come here, quick!"

Automatically Brayley obeyed. He had no opportunity to think, except to realize terrifyingly for the very first time that at dawn he was to die, and that here, perhaps, was a chance to escape.

The man outside the window was bending the bars, using a rifle barrel as a lever. The sun-baked mud in which they were set crumbled away.

Standing on the edge of the raised bed boards Brayley watched the bars give way. First one, then another; then there was a space through which he could crawl. He leaped upward; his nails clawed at the window sill high above him. The stuff frittered and gave way beneath his fingers. He slipped. A hand shot out of the blackness and caught him, pulled him up.

A heave, a short, quick struggle and he was out. He dropped into the black courtyard behind the guard house. Twenty yards away was the barrack wall.

"Come!"

He saw three vague figures close in about him. In silence they raced for the wall. A rope dangled over.

"Sentry?" queried Brayley.

"Dead," answered one of his rescuers. "Go up with care; along the top there is broken glass."

Up and over, then down among the black shadows of the date palms into the marketplace. They reached the narrow lanes, pitch dark and still. They raced on, came to the sand-choked end of the last lane, passed the last tree.

Brayley found himself climbing over rocks, still warm from the heat of yesterday's sun. They went more slowly, up a stiff grade, plowing through loose sand. Down the opposite slope they found horses awaiting them.

WHEN dawn came, Brayley, who was to have died with the rising of the sun, found himself, instead, gorging *couscous* and drinking coffee in the tent of Mohiuddin ibn Tagazzi, an old and dirty man who, at first sight, conveyed an impression of general raggedness and dilapidation.

He sat cross-legged on a mat and seemed to be lost in the folds of his clothes, which were astonishingly dirty. Wisps of gray beard covered his cheeks and chin, the skin on his face was like parchment, crinkled, grooved and scarred. But his eyes were sharp and bright, the eyes of a hawk. He spoke French with the precision of long custom.

"So," he said, as Brayley stuffed the last of the *couscous* into his mouth with greasy fingers, "so, you see, Frenchman, that we,

who are of the desert, laugh at the men who need mud walls to protect them.

"That's all right," retorted Brayley, suddenly on the defensive. "Who said I was French? I'm not, see? I'm an American."

Ibn Tagazzi smiled in his beard, which he plucked with his claw-like hand.

"Yet you wear the uniform of the French. You fight their battles."

"Because, well, because——"

"It does not matter. What does matter is this—you saved my son from those vultures of Souk el Mara. And now my tent is yours, and you are as a second son.

"It is clear that you are a fighter. Come with us! Wherever we go there is fighting, and loot and women. Soon, when one little matter is settled, one debt paid, we go south, toward Fachi, to meet the salt caravan."

"You're going to raid the salt caravan!" Brayley snorted. "You—with a handful of men?"

"It was dark when you came here. Now the sun is up," said ibn Tagazzi, flicking his fingers, palm held downward, toward the flap. "Go look at the handful of men."

Brayley was sprawling comfortably on a looted mat, smoking a looted cigarette. He felt lazy and didn't want to move.

"I'll take your word for it," he began.

"Go look!" repeated ibn Tagazzi, and his voice though friendly rang like smitten steel.

"Oh, all right."

Brayley heaved his stiff body upright and went to the door of the tent. Two steps beyond the entrance he paused and, to express his astonishment, vigorously scratched his head.

The camp was pitched in a deep gulley between two walls of rock. The place swarmed with men, five hundred or more, with their camels and horses and mules and baggage. There was neither order nor method about the camp, and this apparent confusion heightened Brayley's feeling that he was looking at a great horde of raiders.

But what held Brayley's eyes was a row of spears stuck in the ground twenty yards from the tent—on each spear point was a severed head, fresh killed and grinning. There were twenty-seven spears; twenty-seven heads.

Brayley was tough and callous. Since he had been with the Legion he had seen many things deemed unwholesome by those who live within hail of a policeman, but for stark horror he had never witnessed anything quite so gruesome, so wholesale. One head, two, perhaps—but twenty-seven!

"What—" he began.

Ibn Tagazzi stood beside him, chuckling dryly.

"They paid for your freedom," he explained. "Those and as many more besides. Before my son broke the bars of your cell one man, a camel boy, reached the barracks."

"Yes—I heard him scream. Seemed to be in pain."

"He was!" A mirthless, wolfish grin creased ibn Tagazzi's face. "I broke him—but that does not matter. He alone was allowed to live when we caught Yacub Yar Fedjeb's caravan unawares two nights ago. *Haie!* We swept them off their feet at one rush, and they died squealing like—bah!—like children."

"Don't understand you," Brayley grumbled.

"And yet it is plain. I spared that man's life, knowing quite well where he would go. And he went, and while he made much noise and groaned, for he was in great agony due to the salt which I put in his wounds, my son broke those bars and the sound went unnoticed. So you escaped."

It occurred to Brayley that he was not feeling grateful enough. The sight of those heads all in a row was unsettling, and he did not like the lean, hungry look on the Tuareg's face. Nor did the prospect of spending the remainder of his days wandering over the face of the desert appeal to him much. He recalled almost with regret the whitewashed barrack room where, at least, he had had a bed of his own with his kit, all neat and orderly, on a shelf against the wall. He cursed himself for a fool.

"Well," he inquired tentatively, "what now?"

"You are your own master. For reasons of your own you helped my son to escape; therefore this tent is yours, and my people are your servants. Stay with us, leave us, choose what horse or weapons you wish—they are yours.

"As I said, soon we go south toward Fachi; beyond, the road lies open to the Niger. Go among the English. But," here he laid a hand on Brayley's arm, "stay with us! True fighters are scarce. You are a soldier—make soldiers of that rabble."

The Tuareg's gratitude weighed heavily upon Brayley.

"Much obliged," he said lamely. "I, too, am in your debt. I don't know what I

want to do. When do you start south?"

"Soon; as soon as one score is settled. For a year or more I ran from the French guns. In a little while I shall show them how hard I can strike. They must avenge the death of those dogs, or else the people of the towns will begin to grumble and cry out. So I wait. I shall lead them on a little way, and then strike—once."

His face set hard as flint; his hands clawed at his beard.

"Those pigs!" he cursed, his voice suddenly shrill and old. "They cannot leave us alone. They want everything. Thus and so we must do because they say it is a law. They come to us, who have owned this land for a thousand years and a thousand years before that, and they say: 'Do not fight each other; do not kill each other. Live in peace.' And they kill us and call us rebels if we live as we have lived since the beginning of time. Me—they took me and put me in a school, while they shot my father, and they taught me French, so that I might become 'loyal'!

"Loyal, *Haie!* Loyal to those damned robbers. But what is mine is not theirs, and they will soon find it out! When we go south, Soldier, you shall see, you shall see! You have no love for the French, eh? I know that much without an answer. And if you leave this tent some day, you shall bear witness in your own land of the valor of ibn Tagazzi and his people."

BRAYLEY nodded his head without enthusiasm. For the first time in five years he began to realize that some of his fellow Legionaires were not such bad fellows after all. There was Gastaldi, the Corsican, who smelled of garlic and told tales of *gendarme*-baiting, and Jukes, the limey, without an 'h' to his name, and pink, fat Reiderscheid all the way from Bavaria. A good gang.

Why had he, Brayley, been such a fool as to run amuck in the bazaar? Still, here he was and the thing had gone too far to be stopped. He'd have to see it through. After all, he had no love for the Legion; he'd be glad to see some of those damn officers and non-coms put out of the way. Ought to be worth seeing.

"It is understood," he said slowly. "I go with you, ibn Tagazzi. But if I change my mind——"

"Then change it. For what you have done, you are my friend, for all time. Whenever you wish to leave us—go, and may the true God bless you, but," he smiled, "here, with us, are honor and spoils and freedom and women; yonder there is only death. Only death, Soldier."

"I——"

"Look!"

A rider came at a gallop down the gulley, urging his exhausted horse with spur and flail. In front of the tent he drew rein and without dismounting spoke excitedly to ibn Tagazzi.

The old raider pulled at his beard and his eyes closed to narrow slits as he listened. The news was not to his liking. He cut short the newcomer's shrill discourse with a swift downward motion of the hand. Surprisingly, his voice carried like the sound of a brass bugle. A string of orders. Confusion followed. Men came running. Before Brayley's eyes the contents of the tent was rolled up and baled, the tent itself dismantled. Camels came lurching up, sank to the ground and were loaded.

Ibn Tagazzi's son rode by at the head of a straggling line of mounted men carrying long-muzzled smooth-bores across their saddle trees. Then came a string of camels and mules and more and still more men.

Some one threw Brayley a tattered blue *djellaba;* some one else brought him a mule to ride. He mounted, feeling with his bare feet for the stirrup irons. The gulley was choked with dust, which eddied up and shone like gold in the sunlight.

The last of the raiders was trotting up the slope out into the open. In the distance, very faintly, a rifle cracked.

"Hurry!" snapped ibn Tagazzi. "Ride!"

They galloped furiously through the dust, following the hollows between the sand dunes, keeping well down under cover, but the billowing sand arose and signaled their presence for miles around.

The sound of rifle shots came dully out of the distance.

"*Spahis,*" grunted ibn Tagazzi.

Brayley tried to whistle, but his lips were caked with dust. It filled his nostrils and lay thick on his eyelashes, it filtered into his mouth and rasped between his teeth. He tried covering the lower part of his face with an end of his *djellaba,* but the jolting of the mule made it work loose. Soon he was very thirsty. The sun scorched his bare head and burned his naked feet. The stirrup irons became unbearably hot. He let his feet dangle free and allowed himself to be jolted along.

mile after mile, endlessly. Sweat streamed off his forehead and carried the dust down the bridge of his nose, into his eyes.

Some time after the firing had dwindled to an occasional shot and finally died away, a body of men cantered up and their leader spoke quickly to ibn Tagazzi.

The latter's eyes blazed. He spat out a curse. The man protested angrily. All in a second, as swiftly as a snake strikes, ibn Tagazzi jerked apistol from his waist band and fired. The man fell forward on his horse's neck and slithered to the ground, beneath the pounding hoofs.

"Take his horse," ordered the raider, turning to Brayley. "Hurry!"

"Say, what——"

"Silence!" ibn Tagazzi barked. "Make haste."

Brayley obeyed, although his first impulse was to retort in hot language; he resented taking orders from a dirty nigger. There was no time to think about that. He quickly changed from the mule to the horse's back.

Then on again.

"That fool," snarled ibn Tagazzi. "I told him to keep the French in the gulley. By Allah! There was never such a coward, May the black angels of hell torment him!

"You, Soldier, take command of those men, now. They will obey your orders. They were to have held the *spahis* until noon. Now we must run, and run! He said the French have sent the *spahis* and black *tirailleurs* and the Legion after us. All the troops of Souk el Mara!

"It is too soon to fight yet. But only the *spahis* are mounted. The others came on foot. They will tire soon. In a day or so, and then—" his hand came down like a chopper— "and then, Soldier, you shall have your revenge. Wait till they are winded and desert-weary. Wait!"

NOON. A handful of dates, a mouthful of warm water, and then on again through the dust. Brayley rode humped in his saddle, trying to think. His mind, however, would not function. Scraps of thought jolted out of him as his horse lurched from loose sand to rock and back again.

Revenge— shoot his own men— Taking orders from a damn nigger— Chance to escape— Chasing all over Africa in a blue nightgown— Wish he hadn't had so many drinks— His feet were blistered — Hurt like poison— Left his shoes in the cell——

Dusk. Shots from far ahead. A sudden sharp rattle of musketry, swelling to a roar and ending abruptly, to be followed by faint shouts. Ibn Tagazzi had gone on, swerving around the Tuaregs who had spread out in a half circle.

Brayley rode forward more slowly. He caught sight of some scraggly trees outlined against the pale green of the sky. An oasis. He passed some bodies, men an horses lying stiffly in the sand, and made his way toward a clamorous group.

Above the swarming mass suddenly appeared a thing—a head, a white man's head stuck on a lance point. It was surmounted by a French *képi*. It leered, pop-eyed, and as the lance swung and dipped drops of blood flew from the severed neck.

At sight of the Legionaire the group broke up and carried the trophy toward him. They surged about him, shouting, suddenly gone mad with the madness of fanatics. And Brayley quickly caught the note of latent hatred which underlay their exultation. What they had done to this one they would do to him.

They clawed at his bridle, at his swollen feet, plucked at his arms, pointing ironically at the bobbing head. It was thrust in his face so that he felt the rasp of the unshaved dead cheek on his forehead. He drew back and the mob yelled its delight.

Ibn Tagazzi fought his way through to Brayley's side. The Tuaregs gave way, sullenly, regretfully.

Later, over a camel-dung fire, ibn Tagazzi talked before he slept. A French post had been occupying the oasis. A sergeant and six Senagalese. They had been trapped, massacred. It was a beginning. More would follow. It was a good omen. The next day they would reach the oasis of Ben Ahoued. It would be a long day's march, longer by half as much as the distance they had just covered. Here they would wait for the French, catch them off their guard when they were weary and short of water. Then—again ibn Tagazzi brought down his hand like a chopper—then would come the last blow. They would wipe out the French, blot them out.

Brayley sat silent, huddling by the small fire even though the night was still and hot.

"Thou shalt lead the last rush, holding in check the mounted men," explained ibn Tagazzi. "My son shall pave the way, but the last rush shalt be thine to make. In the meanwhile it will be wise for thee

to stay close beside me until my people know thy worth. They have no love for the French."

"They'd like to butcher me," croaked Brayley. "I tell you, I don't know what I want to do."

"Make haste to make up thy mind," snapped ibn Tagazzi. "Time grows short. Thou art still my friend whatever thou choosest to do. I have made a promise, but it is wise that a man should know his own desires."

He stretched out and slept, and Brayley watched the fires go out one by one and the camp settle down to silence while he tried to make peace with himself.

Then it was dawn and the long ride began again. This time Brayley and the Tuareg rode at the head of the column, where they avoided the dust clouds. But the pace was exhausting. Underfed, parched, burned by the sun, Brayley became light-headed and faint as time went by.

Noon again. High noon. They halted in an arid waste and Brayley slid from his horse to join ibn Tagazzi. The old man's fox-like eyes, watching him through narrow slits, suddenly crystallized the resolve he had not been able to formulate.

He could't shoot down his own kind—be damned if he would—not with niggers for buddies anyway.

"I leave you here," he said roughly. "I cannot go on."

The old man betrayed no surprise.

"It is written," he agreed. "I am not your master. You go back—to what?"

"Don't know. Don't care. It is all the same to me. I'm sick of your damn savages chopping off white men's heads, I'm sick of the damn barracks! Oh, God," he cried desperately, stung by ibn Tagazzi's composure, "you damn saint, give me a gun and I'll fight any man you've got."

Ibn Tagazzi took no heed of the insult.

"Thou art a brave man, a fighter and my friend," he said. "Thou hast eaten my salt. I have no wish to see thee die. I know what is gnawing at thy soul, and I can understand. Peace be with thee!"

He extended his thin hand and shook Brayley's limp one. Then he gave sharp orders. Dates and a water bag were left beside Brayley.

Again ibn Tagazzi shook hands. More orders; the Tuaregs swung away at a trot. Dust arose. Men streamed by, staring at Brayley, some jeering him, some cursing, some shaking their weapons, but none touched him.

The last rider disappeared. The dust settled. Brayley stood alone on the hill-top, motionless, watching toward the north for the coming of the French.

ACROSS the desert toiled a long line of men, creeping like ants over the empty waste. Ahead, spread out fan-wise rode the *spahis*, their blue-lined burnouses flapping in the light breeze. Then in disorderly formation straggled the Senegalese, two companies of them, burly happy blackmen glad to be out in the open and away from their barracks.

Behind crawled the transport wagons and the water carts and the machine-gun limber, creaking and squealing through the clinging sand.

And behind the transport, with the dust in their faces, tramped the disciplinary company of the Foreign Legion, in column of fours, in step, their rifles all sloped at the proper angle.

At their head rode Capitaine Grinche, stiff as a ramrod. In serre-file rode Lieutenant Dubronier, neat as if he had just stepped out onto the parade ground.

It was a machine, that company, a high-powered, high-geared killing machine; without bowels and without a soul. When the time came it would fight; for the present it marched in silence, with clamped jaws. For five days they had marched in close formation, in silence, because they were in disgrace, because one of their number condemned to death had escaped.

When the sun struck a man down he was carried to the ambulance cart and his companions cursed him for his good luck. They were a sullen crew, eager to come to grips with the men of ibn Tagazzi, for they knew that in action they could gain escape from the long period of repression; they might be killed, which was final and inconsequential, or they might be fortunate enough to have their sentences curtailed, which meant a very great deal.

Toward ten o'clock in the morning Lieutenant Dubronier, to escape for a second from the choking dust, rode out a little way on the right flank. He was feeling extremely disgusted. This punitive expedition had meant the cancellation of his three months' period of leave. He was forced to stay on in the heat, the glare and the sand. All because of a damn trooper he was obliged to forego the pleasures of

Paris and risk his skin chasing a petty robber all the way to the Niger. If ever he laid hands on that man Brayley he would—he would——

He reined in his horse on the crest of a hill, reined it back on its haunches. Down the reverse slope, coming toward him at a shambling run, was a man in a ragged *djellaba*, an unarmed man who held both hands above his head in token of submission.

But it might be a trap. Dubronier's whistle shrilled piercingly. With drawn revolver he waited for the man to come closer, while to his support raced half a dozen *spahis*, surprised because they had missed this solitary figure.

As the man stumbled forward Dubronier all at once stared, wideeyed with astonishment, and from his lips burst an amazed oath.

"*Sacré nom*—it is Brayley!"

He flew into a passion of rage.

"You damn pig," he barked. "You think to escape, eh? And even your friends, the dirty Tuaregs will have nothing to do with you! They leave you in the desert! It is what you deserve. But the execution squad awaits you. You shall go all the way back and be shot as you deserve."

"Don't make a song out of it," Brayley said thickly. "I came back to tell you——"

"Insults!" exclaimed Dubronier. "You scum!"

He struck Brayley full in the face with his switch. It left a red welt from temple to chin, from which purled drops of blood.

The soldier stared straight into his officer's eyes.

"I came back to tell you," he began in the same colorless voice.

"Shut up!" ordered Dubronier. "March in front of me. We'll tie you up. Make an example of you."

"The Tuaregs——"

Once more the officer's whip struck Brayley, tearing away a strip of sunscorched skin.

"Get on! We'll deal with the Tuaregs, never fear. Now be silent or I shoot, as I have every right to do. There's no reason for keeping you alive, except as a warning to others." He turned to the riders and snapped, "*Spahis*, back to your stations!" Then he drove his captive before him back toward the column.

From the Legion, from a hundred and twenty-five parched throats came a sudden wave of sound, a gust of ironical mirth. They were laughing at Brayley in his tattered blue cloak.

With clenched teeth, his nails cutting into the palms of his hands, head up, Brayley walked toward them. This was his reward: the fools laughed at him—wouldn't even listen to his warning.

Dubronier made haste to report to his captain, pouring out the story of his capture.

"Tie him to the tail-board of the machine-gun limber," ordered Grinche, "where the men can see him. I'll speak about him to the commandant when we halt."

"*Mon Capitaine*," pleaded Brayley, "ibn Tagazzi is close by. I came to warn you——"

"Oh, tie him up," Grinche ordered in a bored voice. "He's hopeless. If the commandant agrees, since sentence has been passed, we shall— what!"

FROM the head of the column came faint cries. The *tirailleurs* had come to a sudden stop.

Crack, crack, crack! A sudden rattle of shots.

The *spahis* outposts came at a gallop over the crest of the ridge. Brayley saw one of them slip out of the saddle and lie where he fell, while the horse swerved and went racing away out of sight.

Bugles! All down the line they rang out their warning.

The isolated reports all at once merged into one long, thunderous roll. From the low sand hills to the right of the column fire leaped all down the line. Men began to fall; some lay still; others screamed.

Brayley was forgotten. The machine-gun crew jostled him aside, butting him out of their way. Slugs spurted into the sand. Two of the gunners went down, shot through the head with the same bullet. The gun lay beneath them.

The volume of fire increased. A man ran past Brayley, holding his throat with both hands. Between his fingers blood ran in little streams. He ran straight on, as one blind, until he tripped over a body and fell like a stone.

Captain Grinche turned to his bugler in time to see him collapse, howling, his stomach torn open by a ricochetting slug. The captain snatched up the bugle.

"Open order, fire at will!" sang the voice of brass.

Automatically the order was carried out.

The noise became deafening. The Legion was melting away.

Brayley plucked at the officer's sleeve.

"*Mon Capitaine*——"

"You? I am going to kill you now!"

Grinche, his face gray with anxiety, leveled his revolver at Brayley's head. Before he could pull the trigger, a bullet smashed its way through his breast-bone with a dull *thlock*. The impact lifted him off his feet and threw him down on his back, where he lay grotesquely huddled with his arms beneath him.

Away at the other end of the line, Dubronier was now in command.

Brayley kicked the captain over onto his face and, snatched up the revolver. As he looked up he saw the Senegalese swarming up the slope toward the hidden marksmen. Many had dropped their bayoneted rifles in favor of their heavy machetes. The sun glinted on the naked blades. The yells of the charging men carried above the sound of the firing.

Then came the avalanche. From the left flank, swept the mounted hosts of ibn Tagazzi. They rolled the *spahis* back and crushed them underfoot. The last waving burnous went down and the tide rolled on, a living battering ram. It plowed down the side of the column, annihilating all resistance by the force of its impact.

Caught between two fires, trampled benath galloping hoofs, the column gave way. In many places it was overrun completely. Here and there groups of men held out.

Bugles blared, clamoring their desperate summons.

"Close up ranks! Close up! Close up!"

Through the veil of dust thundered the horsemen.

Brayley grinned as he saw them coming. Shielding himself behind the limber, he fired coolly, picking off his men.

Still the bugles shrilled above the din of the battle.

"Close ranks! Close up! Close up!"

The horsemen had thrust a wedge between the Senegalese and the Legion. The black troops were cut to ribbons, but they were dying gamely; caught on mid-slope ankle-deep in loose sand, they were rolled hither and yon like peas rolling about in a pan.

The Legion fought on, facing both ways at once. For a time they held off the horsemen, but gaps appeared and through the gaps poured screaming fanatics slashing and stabbing, men who were glad to die if they took with them a white man at the end of their spears.

It was slaughter. The bugles stilled one by one as the buglers died. From the shelter of the sand dunes emerged ibn Tagazzi's footmen, running like great flapping carrion crows toward the wounded and the wagons. The screams became howls; then silence spread as death overtook the wounded. Women, old hags, ran among the writhing survivors, and they, it seemed, were worse than their men.

BRAYLEY saw them at their work and very quickly went mad. It was a personal affair now between him and those ghouls. He had found a rifle and gathered about him a score of cartridge pouches. He knelt by the overturned limber and fired slowly, aiming each round. He knew that he must die, and he was glad that, at least, he was going to die decently and not without honor. Around him were the dead and for the first time in many years he was happy because he had something that he could fight for, even if the "something" was only a corpse.

When he paused to reload his rifle he saw Dubronier come staggering through the mist toward him—Dubronier and a handful of men. The battle flared up about them at once as the Tuareg horsemen closed in.

There was a glistening, dark stain on the officer's tunic, all down his right side. He was crying as he staggered forward. He caught sight of Brayley—and he smiled.

"Fine, *mon brave!*" he said. "You do good work. But it is the end. We——"

He sagged and dropped to his hands and knees, looked up and tried to speak.

"The Legion does not——" A froth of pink foam bubbled out of his mouth and down his chin. He spat it out and hiccoughed. "The Legion does not surrender."

Bright blood jetted from his lips and he died.

"All very well for him," grunted Gastaldi, the Corsican. "He's finished. Let's surrender. I'm down to twelve rounds and those women——"

"Surrender be damned!" Brayley shouted at them. "Surrender to those dirty niggers. You yellow dogs! Get behind the water cart. Tip it over—that'll make good cover. Run for it!"

As they rushed across the intervening space Brayley stumbled upon the tripod of the machine-gun, half buried in sand.

"Hell! Never thought of it!" he swore bitterly. "Left it there all this time! Come back! Come back! Here's the mach.ne-gun!"

"You damn deserter," someone cried, "what are you trying to give us orders for? Think you'll be promoted? Go to hell!"

But two men joined him: a big Norwegian named Morensen, and Bartelli, an Italian.

The firing had stopped. The Tuaregs paused to watch this last handful of white men prepare to die. From his perch behind some low-lying rocks ibn Tagazzi watched the dust subside.

"Thou seest the blue *djellaba* down yonder by that cart?" he said to his son. "That is our soldier. I think he will have to die. It is a pity, for he is a fighter after my own heart and there has been enough slaughter. Yea, even enough for me! However—" he flung out his hands with a gesture of finality—"we cannot wait here overlong. Go and finish them!"

So the Tuaregs ceased their work among the dead and circled in about the two small groups of Legionaires.

Brayley saw them coming. With trembling hands he and his two companions fitted the gun parts together, cleaned the sand-clogged mechanism, set it up on its tripod, broke open the ammunition box.

The heart had gone out of the men sheltering behind the water cart. For a minute or so they exchanged shots with their assailants, then flung down their rifles and jumped up, waving their hands. The Tuaregs roared with delight and rushed in.

"That damn officer told 'em to fight," snarled Brayley. "They ain't surrendering. By God, they ain't!"

And the machine-gun awoke, hammering out its staccato death song.

Brrrrrrap!

The sand leaped around the feet of the surrendering Legionnaires; bullets smacked into the water carts.

Brayley steadied his elbows on his knees and the stream of lead found its mark; for a second or so it sprayed soldiers and Tuaregs alike and mowed them down. They died in a heap.

In a mass the Tuaregs threw themselves at the machine-gun. Once they rushed, twice; their dead littered the ground in swaths. They were blown away. They could not stand before the deluge of bullets poured into them by this one man. They drew back to give their marksmen a chance to silence this remnant. A slug found Bartelli's heart and he died, sprawling across the gun barrel.

Brayley threw him to one side.

"Mortensen," he ordered, "get the next belt ready. This one is almost finished."

"I got—" began Martensen, when a bullet caught him in the stomach and it took him ten minutes to go to his appointed Valhalla.

Ibn Tagazzi saw the mounds of his dead, saw the one man in the tattered *djellaba*, heard the harsh rattle of the machine-gun, and he called off his warriors. They withdrew snarling, afraid of the lone soldier who held a whole people at bay.

"Now," said ibn Tagazzi, "give me my rifle."

Carefully he took aim, carefully he fired, and the stream of lead stopped abruptly. But the bullet had only smashed the jacket of the gun. Brayley was unharmed. He leaped to his feet and shook his fist at the host before him.

"Come on! Come on and fight, and be damned to you!" his voice carried faintly to the watchers on the crest.

"It is enough," said ibn Tagazzi. "Now we can go. Let that man live, for he was—is my friend, and such fighters are few."

THE relief column was commanded by a lieutenant colonel. It comprised a battalion of Senegalese and a battery of light artillery and a whole machine-gun squad.

It did not find ibn Tagazzi, but it did find the bones of the first expedition, and the things the Feutenant colonel said are unprintable. When he calmed down he gave orders that the remains of the ill-fated officers be saved for a decent military funeral.

Some days later in the barrack square at Souk el Mara the official obsequies took place. There were speeches and the Senegalese band played the funeral march as the caskets were carried out of the officer's quarters and loaded on the caissons.

At the grave side there were more speeches, long ones, and the firing party fidgeted with their rifles while a brigadier general spoke eloquently.

"We shall not forget the last glorious stand made by these heroes. Their names are forever inscribed in our hearts—" he

fumbled with his notes and read off—"Braillon, Grinche, Dubronier——"

A tremor of surprise ran down the lane of mourners and the general looked up from his manuscript. Staring at him from across the grave was a living skeleton of a man in a blue *djellaba* carrying on his shoulder a thing, a thing which was rotten and held together by shreds of what had once been a uniform.

"What the devil!" choked the general.

"You said 'Dubronier'," said the man. "There he is—Dubronier."

And he let drop the thing he was carrying into the open grave. Then he laughed.

"Who—what are you?" stammered the general, and those who heard him afterward declared that his voice was like the voice of a child screaming out in a nightmare.

"I am," the scarecrow said very clearly, "Brayley, soldier of second class, disciplinary company of the Foreign Legion, condemned to be shot to death for striking my superior officer. *There* is my officer."

"Oh," said the general, "I see." He was clawing at his tight collar with both hands. "I see—you're the man who escaped."

"I brought him back," said Brayley. "We got lost, but I brought him back—yes. Somebody came and helped us—long time ago, gave us water. I forget when—long time ago—yes."

Then he drew himself up almost straight; he was all bent over from the weight of the thing he had been carrying.

"Disciplinary company ready for duty, *mon Général!*" he said.

And as he brought his hand up to the salute, he fell backward and was dead.

BUT the thing did not end there. They buried Brayley in the military cemetery and put a regulation cross above his grave. There was no firing party, however, because no one knew exactly whether he deserved one or not.

Three weeks later the grave was found to have been broken into and the remains spirited away.

Now, little or no credence can be attached to the things the people of Souk el Mara say, but they swear by their many gods that this is the only truth: that away, away over on the other edge of the desert at a lost oasis there is a huge marabout, a shrine, which six hundred of ibn Tagazzi's slaves erected over the bones of a white man, and that on the wall of the shrine there hangs a tattered blue *djellaba*, which, if one touches it, will give one superhuman courage and strength.

And the people of Souk el Mara declare that the French were fools to bury such a holy man in a hole in the ground.

Which may or may not be true.

CURED BAD MEN

MANY years ago two young Mormon farmer boys, sons of a respectable rancher, their imaginations no doubt fired by the example of the Apache Kid who was then terrorizing Arizona, took two of their father's horses and started for the hills. They left a notice to the effect that they were "bad men" and would kill anybody that tried to capture them.

Ranger Oscar Felton was sent after them and his methods typify the keen insight into human nature of the old Westerners as well as a wise tempering of justice with mercy.

For three days he followed them across the scorching desert, always keeping some ten miles behind. The third night, however, he waited until the two lads of seventeen and eighteen, worn out with excitement and fatigue, had fallen asleep. Then he disarmed them both.

At daylight he started them back on foot across the desert. He rode his own horse and led theirs. Day after day—day after day—their feet blistered from walking in their high-heeled boots, begging, pleading, crying disconsolately, he kept these erstwhile embryo "bad men" trudging toward home.

When within a mile of their father's ranch he spoke for the first time. "Now I reckon you two bad hombres are cured. Take your hosses and go home to your pappy and tell him I said to whale hell out o' you. Then behave yourselves!"

His idea was right. Instead of a life of crime, violence and bloodshed, those two youths are now prosperous and respected ranchers and each has a brood of youngsters of his own.

Only Oscar and they, for their father has long since died, ever knew the secret of their brief career as bad men.—R. E. D.

CROSS and sword together, as always in the lands the Spaniard colonized; cowled and robed Franciscan stalking beside helmeted and armored *soldado*—so in 1718 came the expedition of Don Martin de Alarcon to the head-springs of the San Pedro. Here, in 1689, Don Alonzo de Leon had been greeted by the Indians with cries of *"Tejas! Tejas!"* (Paradise!)

Nearly a generation later, in the year 1715, Padre Olivares was induced by the beauty of the country to stop and begin the establishment of a mission. He commenced to Christianize and educate the Indians, but without means or influence, he found himself compelled to await the coming of someone with military or civil support. This person was found in Don Martin De Alarcon. So on May 1, 1718, was founded the Mission of San Antonio de Valero—the famous Alamo. Since the priests must be protected as they converted the Indians, De Alarcon also established the Presidio of San Antonio de Bexar.

From the beginning the Indians resented Spanish encroachment upon lands held from immemorial time by the red man. Even reinforcements arriving in 1720, increasing San Antonio's number of clerical and military men and resulting in a stronger fort on the Plaza, by no means lifted the menace of the hostile Indians.

Newcomers were few in the drowsy years of the settlement's Mexican history. Some dozen families of Canary Islanders were sent by the Crown. These newcomers, by royal proclamation made hidalgos—gentlefolk—whatever they had been in the Canaries, settled in neither presidio nor mission, but built their own town of San Fernando.

So, each jealous of the others, there was now a city, a presidio and a mission. For years the name applied to the combination of the three was variously "San Fernando," "San Antonio" or "Bexar." But, with abandonment of the mission, in 1793, one discordant element vanished. Then gradual merging of town and military reservation resulted in supplanting of the other names by "San Antonio."

With birth of the Texas Republic, San Antonio saw another chapter added to her colorful history. Almost at the door of her storied Veramendi Palace died gallant Old Ben Milan in December of 1835. Within a few feet of the room in which James Bowie had married Governor Veramendi's daughter, those Texans who had answered Milan's challenge saw him die, his mad charge to take the town successful. It is interesting to consider that of the three cries in Texas history which have yet power upon the Texans' pulses—"Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!" and "Who will go with Old Ben Milan into San Antonio?"—two belong to San Antonio.

In the now famed Alamo, Travis's heroic company wrote with its blood an unforgettable page of history. In turn Mexican and Texan held San Antonio. But at last, with peace, came a truly Texan spirit to the old town. The Indians were now to learn that the old days of an obsequious populace were vanished.

In 1840 the Commanches offered to bring in their prisoners for ransom. They were warned to come only if they brought all white captives. So into San Antonio rode sixty-five Commanches, among them a dozen chiefs. But the Indians had no idea of fulfilling their pledges. They brought only one girl, who told the Texans that the Commanches planned to deliver one or two prisoners at a time, thus receiving large ransoms over an extended period.

Reproached by the Texans for bad faith, the chiefs bore themselves as if dealing with timid Mexicans. Muke-war-rah, a war-chief, shrugged indifferently. The other prisoners were with other tribes, he said. These must be dealt with directly. Then, after a cool look around him, "How do you like the answer?"

It was decided to hold the chiefs as hostages. This announcement was signal for a desperate battle, and outside the other Commanches joined the fight. Thirty-five Indians, including all the chiefs, and seven Texans died in this Council House Fight. The squaws and children were held until white prisoners were exchanged for them. Shall we call this the Beginning of the American San Antonio?

THE CRIME OF KING KOMBALI

By LEO WALMSLEY

Old Kombali was a pretty good king as African kings go, but his suave missionary-taught son was quite another proposition—a proposition Kombali would have handled effectively were it not for Commissioner Brett and the white man's law

SLANTING along the northwest boundary of Samabarland and dividing British territory from Portuguese is a wide strip of pleasant country called Boanda; pleasant in many ways. First, it is high lying, consequently it is cool. Second, it possesses two rivers which run the whole year around; droughts there are unknown. Third, the soil is so fertile that if you throw grain upon the ground before the morning mists have cleared you will see by evening the seeds have burst and already taken root. A healthy, fertile, bounteous country. Small wonder that since time immemorial unceasing wars have been waged for its possession. The Yao, the Masi, the Wanyanmwezi, the Wagogo, the Wahei, probably every warlike tribe of Central Africa have, in turn, occupied Boanda, to yield it only to another.

The slave-dealing Arabs had possession of it for a while. They were driven out by their own half-caste offspring, the coast Swahili. The Swahili yielded it back to the Yao. The Yao fought the Wahei; the Wahei gave way before the people of the Congo—and when the white man came to Africa on his purely innocent and disinterested missions, Boanda became once more a cauldron of dispute.

Germany, France, Holland, Portugal, Great Britain, each claimed the right to take Boanda's poor war-oppressed people under its protection. The Boanda people protested to the best of their ability that they did not wish for protection, that they were perfectly able to look after themselves—which was of course absurd. Boanda was subjected to a trignometrical survey, and chopped into three parts, which on the new map of Africa were tinted red, green and pale lemon respectively.

The red patch was considerably larger than the others. It was the British lion's share. Britain did not attempt any definite colonization. She was content to have her patch tinted the same color as Sambaraland, to build a couple of good roads, from one end of it to the other, to make the inhabitants more or less subservient to British law, and to establish a commerce that was advantageous to the Wa-Boanda as it was to the cotton-spinners of Manchester and the tin-pot makers of Birmingham.

Apart from this—and a small matter of hut-tax, payable to the British Government—Boanda was an independent state. It was ruled over by a real king whose name was Kombali, who lived in a palace at a place called Mafaka, and who possessed among other things a spring mattress, a gramophone and a cuckoo-clock.

Kombali on the whole was a decent sort of chap. He did not like the white man, it was true. He certainly never saw the justice of that hut-tax, which robbed the royal coffers of something like five hundred pounds a year. He realized, however, that the British law in most other ways was sound, and he dispensed it in very able fashion, such being part of the duties assigned to him by the treaty. It is a convenient way of running a country. There was no police or military service to keep up. There was no need even for a tax-collector. Kombali did all that himself; and one Englishman, Brett of Sabara, merely saw that he did it well.

Brett liked Kombali. It was Brett who had been mainly responsible for the framing of that treaty, and for the king's actual accession to the throne. Brett knew Boanda better, perhaps, than any living man. He realized there never would be order there until a kingship was established; and, discovering that Kombali's claims were as strong as anyone's, and that his vices were comparatively speaking mild, he had backed Kombali for the job, and won even in face of the strong opposition offered by Dyke and the Bishop of Sambaraland.

Sir Edward Dyke was Brett's superior officer. He had lived ten years longer in Africa than had Brett, and he had his own theories about Boanda. Compressed, they amounted to a complete disbelief in the revival of the throne, and an equally profound conviction that Boanda should simply be added to the British Empire. In this the bishop was against him. He considered that Boanda should be given absolute independence, with a proviso that Kombali should not under any circumstances be made king: for Kombali was an out-and-out and utterly unmissionisable pagan; his father had been a cannibal, and there was evidence that he himself while young had tasted human flesh.

THE battle raged for two years. There were questions in Parliament about it; there were letters to the London *Times;* the missionaries held meetings of protest.

Brett won, but he had no delusions about his protégé. He had evidence far stronger than the bishop ever possessed of Kombali's youthful indiscretions in the matter of diet. He knew him as a liar, a thief, a cheat, and a potential tyrant. But he knew also there was none among his tribe better fitted to wear the gilt and tinsel crown and to sit on the noble throne which Kombali had bought from a certain not too scrupulous English trader for the sum of one hundred oxen. The fact is that Brett knew Kombali inside out, and Kombali knew that he knew him. Kombali will never forget the occasion when, in presenting the yearly hut-tax, his account erred on the wrong side to a matter of two thousand rupees.

Brett did not become angry.

"Kombali, is thy kingdom so utterly worthless that thou wouldst dispose of it for a paltry two thousand rupees?" he just said simply.

Kombali's heart went cold. He called for his head chamberlain, a villainous old Arab named Abdullah.

"Abdullah," he said, "the Great White Master has been considering thy accounts. There is perchance an error of some two thousand rupees. If so the error is thine. See to it without delay and return with the full amount.

"In my father's day," continued Kombali to Brett, "a man would have been staked out in the track of the red ants for such dishonesty as his. Perchance the Great White master can think of some suitable punishment within the English law——"

"The time is not yet come," said Brett calmly, staring into the king's brown eyes, "when the embezzlement of money belonging to the Great White King across the Sea—to whom thou art but a maggot—has ceased to be an offense of outstanding gravity, punishable in ways that are best not described. It is well to remember, O Kombali, that even thou art subject to the law."

Kombali never tried to "cook" the hut-tax again.

Kombali had been King of Boanda for fifteen years when Sir Edward Dyke was made Governor of Sambaraland, next door to Kombali's domain. His Excellency's dislike for Brett's protégé was well known. Kombali on hearing of the appointment sent a polite message to Brett, requesting him, if he could spare the time, to call at Mafaka. By then the king had grown too fat for such a strenuous journey as a visit to Sambara necessitated. Brett complied with the royal request, not omitting to explain, however, that other duties had brought him to Boanda, and that his visit to Mafaka was merely incidental. Jock, his Airedale, went with him.

Brett was received with the customary show of hospitality. A special hut was placed at his disposal; chickens, eggs, fruit were loaded upon his cook, and the king himself held out in his hand an exquisite eland bone for the delectation of Jocki—the marvelous dog of the Great White Master. Jock refused it. Although he recognized Kombali as a cut above the ordinary native, he was still a native, and as such to be politely but firmly regarded.

Kombali was very uneasy of mind. The Great Bwana Dyki, he explained to Brett, was not well disposed toward him. Brett agreed. The missionaries, too, were looking forward to the day when Kombali as a king would be no more. Brett did not deny it. There was one missionary in particular—he had built a beautiful house not very far from Mafaka, and his name was Mak-don-aldi—who undoubtedly regarded the king as a devil. As the Rev. James Macdonald had personally described Kombali to Brett as a "drunken, thieving, lying son of the de'il himself," even this statement went unchallenged. There was something more behind old Kombali's uneasiness than this; Brett waited in patience. He was not unduly surprised to hear at last that it concerned Halfiz, Kombali's eldest son.

Brett knew Halfiz—knew him well. So for that matter did Jock, for on one occasion Halfiz had been indiscreet enough to treat the Airedale as he would a pariah that happened to cross his way. In short, Halfiz kicked him. It was not Jock's fault that the royal family did not suffer an immediate bereavement. Brett happened to be near at hand and called him off in the nick of time.

Halfiz, to his father's undying sorrow, had in his early youth come under the influence of the missionaries. He had learned to read and write, not only in Swahili—which was the language of the court—but also in English. His career at the missionary school was, in fact, a brilliant one; so much so that, at the end of it, nothing would satisfy his teachers and himself but that he should go down to the coast and enter the big missionary college at Coomall.

There, it is alleged, the little prince won the hearts of all the staff by his pleasant manners and diligence in the pursuit of knowledge. He developed a decided aptitude for literature, won prizes in bookkeeping, mathematics and history, and finally passed out top man of his year—destined ultimately, it was understood, for the mission field. But Halfiz modestly protested that he was not yet a sufficiently good man. He came home, borrowed from his royal father the equivalent of five hundred pounds and set off for Europe, with the avowed object of continuing his religious studies.

FOR a space of two years little was heard of his Royal Highness, apart from frequent and urgent requests to Kombali for remittances of cash. The pursuit of religious knowledge apparently was expensive. When you pursue it chiefly in Maida Vale, and Piccadilly and Montmartre, it is. Then Halfiz returned. He called on Brett on his way upcountry. He was dressed immaculately in white drill, stiff, laundered collar, a carefully chosen tie, and the latest thing in pith headgear. He also wore tortoise-shell spectacles. He came right up to the bungalow, saw Brett on the veranda, and spoke to him as one gentleman to another.

"Hello! old bean," he said. "How are things? Got anything to drink?"

Brett never erred on the side of verbosity.

He made a noise in his throat that might have been a swear, and probably was, and the next moment his Royal Highness was tearing down the avenue toward the village, with Jock hanging on like grim death to the rear portion of that immaculate suit.

A ghost of a smile flitted over Kombali's face as Brett reminded him of this pleasant incident.

"Ah!" he said. "If the marvelous Jocki had only behaved similarly with the flesh itself. Beware, O Bwana Brett, of thy first-born. To me my son is as a bed of thorns; I cannot think of a death I would not have him suffer."

"Where is Halfiz now?" Brett questioned. "What is thy great trouble with him?"

Kombali spat.

"Where should he be—but with that Bwana Mak-don-aldi, scheming for the bringing about of Kombali's downfall? Pah! I would throw him to the hyenas. I would——"

It appeared that Halfiz on his return to the palace had made a polite but earnest request; first, for a state appointment with a salary in keeping with his dignity as an eucated African prince; second, for the gift of a lump sum of money, or convertible property, to enable him to discharge

certain debts that had been incurred by him at Johannesburg, and to purchase from the same city an automobile of similar worth to that possessed by Bwana N'Kubwa Dyki, the new Governor of Sambaraland.

Kombali, just as politely and just as earnestly, had consigned his son to the African equivalent of Hades and thrown him out of the palace. Halfiz had therefore gone to MacDonald's mission.

"He has taken up the holy work there?" queried Brett, thinking of the way in which Halfiz had asked him for a drink.

Kombali spat again. That son of his had no more of holiness in him than the entrails of a vulture. But it was true that he was teaching in the mission school, that he was preaching in the villages, that he was acquiring much merit among the mission people in consequence. But why was he behaving thus? Was it not clear to anyone? His one desire was to see Kombali deposed, to ascend the throne himself.

What had he said to them respecting his reception at the palace? Had he spoken to them about the *gharri-ya-tug-tug* he wished his father to buy for him? He had not. A spy had overheard him state that he had left the palace because Kombali insisted that he should give up his Christian faith and bow to the old ju-jus. Ah! Halfiz was crafty as a snake. He knew what influence the missionaries had. He knew they were scheming against the throne; that, with Kombali once out of the way, they would do all they could to favor the ascent of one whom they believed to be a good, kind-hearted young Christian.

"If I had behaved to my father as he has done to me, I would have been boiled alive," protested Kombali. "But in these days it is forbidden even that I may slay him straightforwardly. The law of the white man—pah! It is for women, not for men."

"Well, the law is the law," said Brett. "And we have a proverb in our country which runs: 'Those whose huts are built of glass should not throw stones.' Be careful, Kombali. It is true that his excellency, the Governor, likes thee not, and that the missionaries like thee less, for thou art indeed a man of infinite wickedness."

Kombali smiled.

"The Bwana N'Kubwa Brett is a man of infinite wisdom," he said. "Nothing is hidden from his eyes. And Jocki, the dog of the Bwana N'Kubwa Brett, can also look into a man's soul. Ah! In my old age it is good indeed to feel the friendliness of one so great. As for that Halfiz—pah! Bah! To think of him is to be unclean."

Brett laughed, but he was very perturbed. Kombali with all his faults was a born ruler. Brett could never understand Dyke's attitude toward the king, for, even if Boanda were added to Sambaraland, Kombali's influence among the natives would always be a good one, and make for easier and cheaper government. There was no telling what would happen if Halfiz took his place. The missionary people, of course, had been playing for that all the time, and the new Bishop of Sambaraland, a Dr. Peel, was reported to be an old university friend of the governor's. True, they would find the little bounder out in time, but the harm he might do before that happened would be colossal.

"Be careful, Kombali," Brett said, on leaving. "The missionaries are watching thee closely, and it is well known thou art drinking like a hippopotamus. All this will reach the ears of his Excellency, the Governor. And cause no harm to befall thy son; rather be friendly toward him. Keep thy anger in restraint."

On his way back to Sambara, Brett called on MacDonald. Halfiz, however, was away on a preaching tour in the northern part of the country.

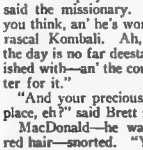
"You're prejoodiced against the mon," said the missionary. "He's not the chap you think, an' he's worth a hundred o' that rascal Kombali. Ah, weel, I'm thinken' the day is no far deestant when he'll be finished with—an' the country will be the better for it."

"And your precious Halfiz will take his place, eh?" said Brett ironically.

MacDonald—he was a little man with red hair—snorted. "You're prejoodiced—the mon's all right. A wee bit young perhaps and inexperienced; but he'll no be without his advisers."

Brett did not agree. He went home.

II



IT WAS from the Rev. MacDonald himself that Brett received first news of the disappearance of Halfiz, son of Kombali. Ten minutes after the missionary's runner had arrived, there came a wire from the governor ordering him to proceed to Mataka and investigate the business without delay.

The commissioner swore as he changed into marching kit. He had been expecting trouble, it was true, but nothing quite so big as this. According to MacDonald, Halfiz had received a special request from his father to go to the palace, two days before the date of MacDonald's letter. The message was a friendly one, and the prince had not hesitated to obey. Two natives were prepared to swear that he had arrived there and had been welcomed by the king himself. Since then he had not been seen again.

Suspecting foul play, for Kombali had on several occasions threatened his son with death, MacDonald had made secret inquiries and discovered that early on the following morning two natives had been seen carrying what apparently was a corpse out of the palace compound, to a field nearby, where they had proceeded to bury their ghastly burden. MacDonald, naturally enough, had not disturbed the spot, nor had he said anything to the king, but he hoped that Brett would lose no time in investigating what had all the appearance of being a most dastardly crime.

It took the commissioner two days to reach Mafaka. He called on MacDonald first. The missionary had little to add to the information contained in his letter. There had been no news of Halfiz. The native witnesses were under lock and key. So far as he knew nobody suspected that anything was wrong. He had deemed it best to give out that Halfiz had gone away on one of his frequent journeys.

Brett thanked him for all the trouble he had taken. He interviewed the two natives separately. They were occasional firewood-carriers to the palace, and they corroborated each other's statement that Halfiz had entered the king's audience "hut" soon after dark, and that Kombali had welcomed him. They had heard no sound of quarreling. Brett was satisfied that they were speaking the truth.

Then the native who had witnessed the burial was brought in. He said that his wife was taken ill about two o'clock in the morning, and that he was going across the village to the hut of her mother. He did not recognize the two natives, nor did he at first think the burden they carried was a corpse. He was not certain that it was one at all, although later, when he saw them lowering it into a hole in the ground, he was very frightened and ran away. How did he come to be near that field? His explanation was satisfactory. His mother-in-law wished for certain medicinal herbs that grew there, and as it was moonlight he went to gather them.

"Well, now for Kombali," said Brett to MacDonald, with a grim smile. "It looks as though you're going to have half your wish anyway."

"Mon, I didn't like the business at a'," said MacDonald, "but I'm thinken it looks verra suspeechus. Maybe the dog there will be of asseestance to you. But I canna help but think the young man's in the field there, for a' that."

Brett called Jock to heel, and, with MacDonald and the native and two police *askaris* he had brought with him from Sambara, set off for the palace.

Although it was well before noon, Kombali was asleep; an empty *ponibè* gourd beside the royal couch gave adequate explanation. It took him a few minutes to collect his wandering wits. Then Brett addressed him, while MacDonald waited without.

"Kombali," Brett asked quietly, "where is Halfiz, thy son?"

Kombali blinked.

"My son—my son? How should I know then, O, Bwana N'Kubwa Brett? What *shauri* is this?"

"It is a *shauri* that may concern thee intimately," Brett answered. "Know also, Kombali, that I am a man whose time is of extreme value, and that speaking the truth will save it. Where and when did'st thou see thy son last?"

Kombali blinked again, and paused a while before replying.

"It was here, indeed, I saw him last—six—perhaps seven days ago. Was it not by thine own advice that I bade him visit me? He came one night; I would not have my servants know it. Abdullah I had sent away; to the rest I had ordered *ponibè* to be given. Pah! How the sight of him roused my anger! Yet I spoke softly, and he went away with the promise of a goodly sum of money making sweet good music in his ears."

"Thou hast not seen him since that day?"

"Not I, Bwana N'Kubwa Brett. What is the *shauri* then?"

Brett did not answer. He asked Kombali to get up. Then with MacDonald, the native, and the two *askaris*, armed with mattocks, he proceeded to the field. Kombali was obviously uneasy. All the way he implored Brett to give some explanation of the business. Why should they be going to the fields at that hour of the day? Could they not wait till the sun got cooler? What was wrong? Brett said nothing,

however. He kept Jock close to heel and set a pace that reduced Kombali to incoherency by the time they arrived at the spot in the field indicated by the native.

"Dig," he said then to the *askaris*.

A native-made grave is never dug deep, except in the rainy season when the earth is soft. In less than a minute the mattocks revealed a blood-stained white-drill jacket obviously recognizable as Halfiz's. Another three minutes and the corpse of the king's son, or rather all that seven days of tropical interment had left of it, was reverently lifted out.

"Thy son?" said Brett laconically to Kombali.

The king was crying like a woman.

"Truly—truly," he answered.

"Take the coat and put him back," said Brett to the *askaris*. And to the missionary, "I leave it to you——"

MacDonald with a quivering voice recited the burial service. The sods were beaten down. Brett turned to Kombali.

"I arrest you on suspicion of murder," he said. "We'd better get back to the palace."

III

BRETT, although perfectly satisfied of the guilt of King Kombali, did not set out for Sambaraland straight away. Apart from MacDonald, who after all could hardly be regarded as an absolutely unprejudiced witness, there was no other white man within a hundred miles. Brett was determined to leave nothing undone that might produce evidence, if not a disproof of Kombali's crime, at least an extenuation of it.

Kombali himself had not wavered in his original statement that Halfiz had parted from him on the best of terms. There was, of course, no witness to prove this. Brett's sense of duty would necessitate the admittance of Kombali's confessed hatred of the murdered prince.

There was another damning piece of evidence in the blood-stained mattock that had been found hidden in the thatched roof of Kombali's sleeping chamber. The king had flatly denied knowledge of this, protesting, as he had done before, that he was the victim of a plot, and even suggesting that MacDonald himself had something to do with the placing of it there and the manufacture of other evidence.

But the commissioner had no doubt about the missionary. He did not like MacDonald, it was true, but there could be no disbelieving the Scotchman's positive sincerity. In fact, apart from the two natives who had been seen to leave the palace compound with Halfiz's body, there was not wanting a link in the chain of evidence against the king; and these men undoubtedly were the two palace servants who had been missing since the night of the crime. Their names were Hamsini, and Ali-bin-Nazar. Sergeant Major Juma and the two police *askaris* who had come up from Sambara at Brett's request were sent out to look for them. Their evidence, of course, would be important.

In the meantime Brett had communicated by runner with Sir Edward Dyke, setting forth the full facts and stating that he was standing by pending instructions. There would not be an answer for four days at least.

It was on the afternoon of the fourth day that one of the *askaris* returned. They had traced Hamsini to a native village way up on the banks of the Kari River, and had arrived there just in time to see the man die. He was too far gone for speech. He had evidently been poisoned. In the pocket of his tunic—he was a house-boy and wore the usual khaki drill clothing—was a small cotton bag containing the sum of fifty silver rupees. Ali-bin-Nazar had also been traced to another village farther west. The Sergeant Major and the other *askari* were in hot pursuit of him.

Brett took the cotton bag and counted out its contents. Fifty rupees was a fortune for a house-boy to possess. Obviously it was the price Kombali had paid him for his assistance—it and the poison!

The old devil deserved what was coming to him then! Two murders—possibly a third. Brett dismissed the *askari* and strolled across to his tent. Should he go in and tax Kombali with this second crime? The king was confined to his sleeping hut, two *askaris* mounting guard. No; after all, his fate was pretty well sealed—no need to bother the old rascal more than was necessary. Brett took the cotton bag from his pocket and idly looked at it. Jock, who, as usual, had his muzzle between his master's knees, gave it an inquisitive sniff; then suddenly he drew back, growling.

"Jock! Jock!" cried the commissioner. "What on earth's up with you? Here—come here!"

Jock did as he was bid. Brett put the bag close upon his muzzle. Again Jock growled. Then Brett got up, walked across

to his steel uniform case and took out a parcel, which he opened.

"Here," he said to Jock. "What about this?"

Jock took a sniff and bared his teeth. It was then that there came footsteps outside the tent and the voice of Sergeant Major Juma.

"What is it?" cried Brett.

The native sergeant came in and removed his tarbosch.

"Bwana N'Kubwa," he said in English, "the man Ali-bin-Nazar. I have investigated him to the village of Simbani, one day's march this place. From there he leave two days ago. I send *askari* on make investigation in surrounding country. But I think very quick work if take Jocki—Jocki follow trail very quick. I think so, Bwana N'Kubwa."

"You have found the hut where he slept?"

"Truly, Bwana N'Kubwa."

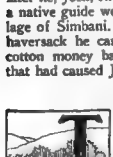
"I will leave immediately. You will stay and take charge of the prisoner."

As Brett was changing, a runner came to the tent with Dyke's message. It was a model of official brevity. Brett read it in one glance.

March prisoner and all necessary witnesses Lombani immediately. Expect you Friday.

Brett grinned and carefully placed the paper in his pocketbook. Ten minutes later he, Jock, two *askaris*, two porters and a native guide were on the road to the village of Simbani. Carefully packed in the haversack he carried at his belt was the cotton money bag, and the paper parcel that had caused Jock to bare his teeth.

IV



THE village of Simbani lies at the foot of a range of wooded hills, which so far as human beings are concerned are entirely uninhabited, for the native will never live on a hill if a valley is available for the growing of his crops. It was early morning when Brett's *safari* arrived there. He was led by the headman to the hut where Ali had slept. It was a deserted one and contained nothing in the way of furniture, and no trace of human habitation save the ashes of a fire on the floor. Jock, however, sniffed round the place with obvious interest, an interest that was greatly increased when Brett took out the parcel and gave the dog a sniff of that, too.

The headman could give no information as to the route the man had gone by. He had left very early in the morning, as was the custom of travelers. He had said he was paying a visit to some relative in the north. He was a complete stranger, but had the tribal marks of the Wa-Boanda. There was nothing in his behavior to arouse the headman's suspicions.

Brett did not question him further. He led Jock to the outskirts of the village and began methodically to work round it. Reaching a path that led up toward the hills, the dog suddenly stiffened, pointed, looked back at his master, and then struck out along it. Brett and the *askaris* followed. The porters were ordered to come along as fast as they could.

The path was at first a well-used one, and Jock repeatedly halted. When at last it entered the woods, he went along with more confidence, and did not hesitate even when it gave out completely and there was nothing at all to mark the trail to human eyes. On the contrary, his pace increased and it was all that the men could do to keep up with him, for the grade was rapidly steepening.

But Jock had little thought of them. There was a mysterious quality in the scent he followed that wrought him to a state of ecstasy. At times he broke into a run, and only the sound of his master's voice caused him to check his speed and for a while take pity on his less fleet-footed friends. He led up to the very crest of the hill, and down its farther slope into a narrow valley, to which he kept for a mile or so before tackling a second and even higher eminence. Gaining the top of this, the party found themselves on a wooded tableland, where the going was better. Once more Jock mercilessly led down and then up again, and gained another ridge only to climb down once more.

About noon Brett was forced to call a halt, but, as Jock refused to take either food or water, it was only a short one, and they were soon climbing again. So they went on throughout the afternoon, up and down, along valleys, across tablelands, climbing over boulders, forcing their way through clumps of cane bamboo, wading through jungle, until shortly before sunset Jock came to a sudden halt before a mass of fallen rocks at the foot of a granite cliff—growled, pointed and dashed forward.

Brett softly called the dog back. There was a smell of burning wood and roasting meat in the air. Looking closely, he observed a thin film of smoke stealing up from behind one of the rocks. He drew his revolver and very quietly approached. Then he dashed round the rock quickly and saw, squatting in front of a glowing charcoal fire, almost stark naked and smoking a filthy native pipe, Halfiz, the King of Boanda's son!

Halfiz was not armed. It would have made no difference if he had been, for Brett had taken him entirely by surprise.

"Well," said the commissioner, "what are you doing here?"

Halfiz, to do him justice, showed not the slightest sign of cowardice.

"I am making a journey," he said. "I intend to visit the villages over there." He waved his hand. "I am camping here for the night."

Brett took from his haversack the cotton bag and the parcel which contained the blood-stained drill-jacket found in the grave.

"Recognize these?" he said.

Halfiz made a sign that he did. They belonged to him. How did they come into the commissioner's possession?

"You've got more pluck than I thought," said Brett. "The coat was found on what I've no doubt was the body of Ali-bin-Nazar, for the murder of whom I am going to arrest you. The bag was found on the body of Hamsini, for whose murder by poisoning you will also be charged. Whether there is evidence to support a charge against you of the attempted murder of your father by conspiracy, I'm not quite sure. It will depend on what thumbprints we find on the mattock you so thoughtfully pushed into the roof of his chamber. I suppose the idea was to wait until he was hanged; then turn up and say you'd been missionizing up here all the time—felt a sudden call. Yet you'd have been found out in the end; your intelligence is not altogether unlimited. Well, got anything to say before I officially arrest you? I warn you that anything you say will be taken in evidence against you."

Halfiz spat.

"Pah!" he said superbly, and it might have been his own father's voice. "I am a prince. I killed two dirty niggers; and would kill my father now if I had his throat within my hands. Would you oblige me with a cigarette? This native tobacco is like manure."

Brett reached out his case. Halfiz calmly took out a cigarette, tapped it, put it in his mouth, lighted it, and inhaled the smoke like a connoisseur.

"Ah!" he said then. "Now one feels like a Christian again. Please arrest me and get it over."

CHEYENNE ATTACK HELPED SENATOR CURTIS

BY CREEPING on hands and knees in the darkness through a circle of attacking Cheyennes, a sixty mile tramp, half walk, half run, to the white settlement of Topeka; and the bringing of the settlers to the aid of the beleagured camp just before the Cheyennes carried it by assault the present majority leader of the United States Senate got his start in life. Senator Charles Curtis of Kansas, the only Senator of Indian upbringing—for he is a member of the Kaw tribe which he saved in the '70's, was then a boy of ten.

The remarkable exploit of the wiry Indian boy attracted the attention of Topeka cattlemen, who gave him a job as a jockey over the frontier circuit of Kansas, Missouri, Indian Territory, and Colorado. Senator Curtis still carries the scars on his hands made by the reins in one sensational spill. He had attempted to ride Headlight, a fast, but uncontrollable horse who would "jump the track" and bolt at every opportunity. The Senator was in the lead at the half-mile post, but there Headlight refused to make the turn and dashed straight on through a fence and over an embankment.

When he became too heavy to ride, at fifteen, Charlie Curtis made up his mind to go back to his tribe. He did go back; but the first night under the tepee his grandmother insisted that he leave the Indians and make his way among the whites, much as she dreaded the thought of separation from the grandson she loved. So Curtis became a night hackman in Topeka—a dismal fall for an ex-jockey—and read law while he was waiting for fares. After his admission to the bar, fortune favored him again when the senior member of the firm collapsed at the climax of a sensational murder trial. But Curtis had prepared himself and was ready; he finished the speech, and won a reputation as a criminal lawyer almost overnight. From that time his rise was steady. Thirty-one years ago he was elected to the House, fourteen years ago to the Senate, of which he is now the majority leader, succeeding the aristocratic Henry Cabot Lodge.—R. R. P.

BILL TILGHMAN

By William MacLeod Raine

One of the last of the old frontier marshals, a terror to law-breakers from the wild days of Dodge City till his recent death, Bill Tilghman went down as he had lived, fearlessly enforcing the law

AT CROMWELL, Oklahoma, there died the other day almost the last, if not the last, of the great sheriffs who carried law and order to our Western border. From some points of view William Tilghman was the greatest peace officer the West ever had. Other marshals and sheriffs held office for two or three years and made reputations. Tilghman fought against crime for more than fifty years, was always in the harness, took a thousand chances, and survived till he was well into the seventies. He made more arrests of dangerous "bad men," broke up more gangs of outlaws, sent more criminals to the penitentiary, than any individual officer on the frontier. And with it all he was quiet, gentlemanly, soft-spoken, never overbearing, a friend of all the little boys in the neighborhood.

"Uncle" Billy fell in the line of duty, shot to death by a Federal prohibition officer whom he was arresting for making a disturbance in front of a dancehall. It was characteristic of Tilghman that, though he "died with his boots on," in the old cowtown phraseology, he had not drawn his revolver from its scabbard. That was his way. He always gave the other fellow the benefit of the doubt. Other noted gunmen shot first and asked questions afterward. Not Tilghman. He took his fighting chance every time. The wise ones shook their heads and said that some day some drunken tough would "get" Bill, but Tilghman paid no attention to their prophecies. It was his business to take chances, so he took them.

For instance, there was the capture of Bill Doolin, leader of the gang of train robbers of that name, one of the fiercest, gamest men on the frontier.

The Doolin gang was terrorizing Oklahoma, as the James-Younger gang had done in Missouri years before and as the Daltons had done in and around the country formerly known as the Indian Territory. It held up banks and trains and raided towns. When mothers wanted to quiet their children they warned that Bill Doolin would get them if they were not good. The outlaw was on the way to become a legend, as Jesse James and Billy the Kid had before him.

But Billy Tilghman nipped the legend business in the bud.

It was not easy to capture the Doolins because they had so many friends among the ranchmen, just as Jesse James had among the Missouri farmers of his day. Tilghman thought it would be a good idea to arrest some of the ranchers who were known to harbor bandits and were suspected of cattle stealing.

Taking Neal Brown with him as deputy, Tilghman left Guthrie with two saddle horses tied behind a covered wagon. They had food and a camping outfit.

It was a bitter cold day in January, 1895, when the officers reached the ranch at Rock Fort, where the principal suspect lived. Snow blanketed the ground, and the sodden sky promised more. Smoke curled from the chimney of the cabin, though no horses or men were to be seen outside.

Tilghman's way was always the simple bold way. He left his rifle in the wagon, walked through the snow to the house, knocked on the door, and when no answer came pushed it open and went inside.

A fire of blackjack logs roared cheerfully up the chimney, in front of which sat the man for whom he was looking, a rifle across his knees. The rancher looked at the officer surlily without speaking.

As Tilghman moved forward to the fire he observed that on each side of the room there was a tier of bunks hung with curtains so that he could not tell whether the beds were occupied or not. His hands were half frozen from the cold. Moreover he had some questions to ask. He turned his back to the fire and put his hands behind him.

Instantly the muscles in Tilghman's body grew rigid and his brain began to work lightning fast. From each bunk, at the edge of the curtain, the barrel of a rifle projected an inch or more. He had walked into a trap. Eight desperate men, dead shots, had him covered and any moment might blaze away at him. If they thought he had a posse with him they would not hesitate for an instant.

Tilghman's nerve stood the test. Not by the twitch of an eyelid or the slightest quaver of the voice did he betray the fact that he knew he was in deadly peril. He talked quietly, casually, about the happenings in Cattleland, touched on the gossip of the day, and inquired about the best road to reach a destination he invented on the spur of the moment. He even joked about arranging a fight between his dog and one of Doolin's. Then, without haste, as though reluctant to leave the good fire, he said he reckoned he must be going.

At an even pace he moved to the door, nodded a careless "So long," and stepped outside.

To Neal Brown he gave quiet orders. "Drive on, not too fast, and don't look round."

In that room were Bill Doolin, Little Dick, Tulsa Jack and others. No man ever had a closer shave. Only the most consummate display of cool nerve saved Tilghman and his deputy. As it was, he had no sooner closed the door than one of the bandits, known as Red Buck, jumped from a bunk and swore to kill him at once. Bill Doolin saved the marshal's life. He closed with Red Buck, struggling with the furious man.

"Bill Tilghman is too good a man to shoot in the back," he said.

Doolin married a preacher's daughter and became a father. Still he led his band on wild raids. He contracted rheumatism and went to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, to take the baths. Through an intercepted letter Tilghman learned he was there.

That night Tilghman entrained for Eureka Springs. Not to be recognized instantly and so be forced to shoot at sight, he wore a long coat and a silk hat.

After careful inquiry Tilghman learned that Doolin was at a bathhouse. The officer walked into the parlor of the place and saw Doolin seated in a corner where he could observe anyone who entered. The unusual clothes deceived him for a moment and Tilghman covered him with his revolver.

"Hands up, Bill!" he ordered.

The tall, lank, sandy-haired desperado looked at him. Doolin had sworn never to be taken alive and Tilghman knew it.

The bandit jumped up, reaching for the weapon hanging under his left arm. Tilghman did not fire, for word had reached him of how Doolin had saved his life a year before. He caught at the outlaw's arm and with his shoulder drove him back to the wall, his own revolver pressed against the stomach of the bad man.

"Don't make me kill you, Bill!" he urged.

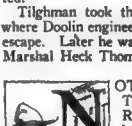
The weight of Tilghman's body pinned the bank robber to the wall and prevented his hand from reaching the revolver under his coat. Doolin struggled to escape from the disadvantage of position. He tried desperately to get at his gun.

With every ounce of strength he had Tilghman held him fast. The barrel of the officer's revolver gouged into the other man's stomach. At any moment it might go off.

Doolin surrendered.

"Yore six-full takes the pot," he admitted.

Tilghman took the outlaw to Guthrie, where Doolin engineered a wholesale prison escape. Later he was killed in a duel with Marshal Heck Thomas.



NOT long afterward Tilghman met Bill Raidler, another member of the Doolin gang, on a road in the Osage Indian country. He had been looking for Raidler a long time, for the outlaw was wanted for several bank and train robberies. Raidler, a desperate char-

acter, had sent word to Tilghman to come and get him if he wanted him. So the marshal had come.

He ordered the bandit to throw up his hands. Raidler in answer fired. Tilghman poured a charge of buckshot into the outlaw that killed him before he was out of the saddle.

Another member of the Doolin gang killed by Tilghman in a personal duel was Dick West, known as "Little Dick." A negro named Calhoun, wanted for murder, was also shot by the marshal after opening fire upon Tilghman.

Bat Masterson, himself one of the most famous sheriffs of the West, leaves it on record that it would take a volume the size of an encyclopædia to record the exploits of Bill Tilghman. The odd thing is that, though fired at a hundred times, he was for many years never touched by a bullet.

"Billy" Tilghman was a buffalo hunter on the banks of the Medicine Lodge River in the early days. He was a boy of seventeen when he went out, among the first of the white men adventuring out to "take the hides off'n them," as the buffalo hunters put it. General Custer had put down an Indian uprising in this part of the country only the year before, and the tribes were sulky and unfriendly. They had been located on reservations, but frequently broke bounds to raid, murder and pillage.

The Tilghman party came back to camp one evening, after a day of hunting, to find their hides destroyed, their provisions stolen, and their camp burned. The situation was precarious. The natives might be lurking in the vicinity to kill them. It was very likely they would return. After a discussion of ways and means the other hunters proposed to move to Mule Creek, twenty miles farther from the reservation.

This did not suit the slim boy who was even then the real leader of the party. He was not ready to move and leave the green hides not found by the Indians.

"We'll peg out the hides to dry. If Mr. Indian comes back I expect I'll be here," he said.

His partners assented. Next day Tilghman did not hunt with them. He hid near the camp in a position that commanded the approach to it.

The Indians must have seen the hunters leave, for presently seven of them appeared on horseback, dismounted and approached. During the night one of the partners had traveled thirty miles and brought back fresh provisions. One of the Indians picked up a sack of flour and threw it across the back of his pony. A battle ensued, during which Tilghman killed four out of the seven.

This established his reputation for fearlessness. During the spring of 1874 there was an uprising of Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches and Kiowas. This was formidable, and lasted for nearly a year. Tilghman was a Government scout and had many close shaves while carrying dispatches. Later he served through the campaign of 1878, when Dull Knife set out from Fort Sill on the war-path with his band of plundering and murdering redskins. Tilghman distinguished himself by riding seventy-five miles through the Indian country to carry word to the soldiers of the dangers of a beleaguered party. Guided by Billy, the cavalry arrived in time to save some of the defenders, though the blockhouse was already in flames.

TILGHMAN moved to a ranch near Dodge City, then the wildest town in the United States. This was in the days of the great cattle drives, some years nearly half a million head passing the town. The Texans driving these were wild untamed youths, and they had money to spend. Gamblers and bad men flocked to the town to share in the harvest. They were a lawless crew. Each man carried his own protection in the holster strapped to his side. Those who engaged in fight and were not quick on the trigger took up permanent residence in Boot Hill, as the graveyard was named because so many of those buried there died "with their boots on."

To preserve law and order it was necessary to have officials of courage. The famous Bat Masterson and his brother Ed were marshals during part of the stormy days. Tilghman, with Ben Daniels as assistant, was marshal during the year of the fire. Robert M. Wright, mayor of Dodge City that year, writes that no braver man ever handled a gun or arrested an outlaw. The marshal passed through many narrow escapes, for it seemed that "every bad and desperate character in the whole West gathered here, and when we would drive out one lot another set would put in an appearance." Ben Daniels was later appointed United States Marshal by President Roosevelt, who said Ben was one of the bravest men he had ever known.

During the three years of his incum-

bency Tilghman cleaned up Dodge so efficiently that the bad men departed for other climes. There was no profit in operating where a man as fearless as the marshal, and one so dead a shot, represented the law. He took his job too seriously to suit them. Therefore they emigrated.

It was Tilghman's rule never to take a life unless he was forced to do so to save his own. No matter how desperate a criminal might be, or how bad his reputation as a "killer" might be, Uncle Billy never shot until the other started hostilities. This vastly increased the risk of his business, since he always gave his opponent first chance and the tenth part of a second might mean the difference between life and death.

Such a man was always in demand to protect society. After he moved from Kansas to Oklahoma nearly all the governors of that state and several Presidents requisitioned his services. He was sent on the most desperate missions and always brought back his man.

He broke up the Jennings gang of train robbers and helped put Al Jennings in the penitentiary. He did much to run to earth the infamous Daltons, who were bank and train robbers of the boldest type. Four of the notorious Starr gang of bandits were put behind bars by him.

THE noted gunmen of the West were of three classes. The first of these was composed of those who were against law and society. They fought, like cornered wolves, without respect for the rights of others. They had "gone bad," and, though they may at times have had generous impulses, the trend of their lives was toward evil. Apparently they enjoyed taking human life. The slightest opposition would set their guns to smoking. Billy the Kid was such a man. Bob Ollinger was another. A third was Doc Holliday. A dozen of them swaggered up and down the streets of Virginia City and Carson before the Vigilantes became active.

The second class was of a more civilized type. It did not set its face against stabilized order in general, though it reserved the right to carry on private vendettas and on occasion to step outside the law. Generally the men of this class were quiet, soft-spoken, and very efficient at the business of killing. Most of them were at one time or another peace officers in wild frontier towns. They were chosen because they were dead shots, had nerve, and had won reputations as gunmen that tended to curb both the criminals and the reckless miners or cowboys frequenting the town. Most of these—at least the ones that I have met—had cold light-blue eyes. They did not take chances with law-breakers but shot swiftly, on sometimes inadequate provocation. Wyatt Earp, Luke Short, Bat Masterson, were of this type.

The third class of gunman was entirely a good citizen. He served society, never attempted to "run" towns, or to settle private scores by the use of official position. Billy Tilghman was one of these. For fifty years, first in Dodge City, Kansas, and later in Oklahoma, he fought against the lawless element relentlessly. During that time he captured scores of murderers, horse-thieves, train robbers, bank hold-ups and bad men. He killed, in the interests of society, when he was forced to do so. But never once did he take the breaks or shoot without giving the other man a chance. In fact he was blamed for going to the other extreme. In order to capture his man alive he would take long chances. It was always held to be a miracle that Uncle Billy had not been killed by some of the desperadoes whom he approached with his quiet formula, "You'd better give me your gun."

In the end he fell a victim to his principle of choosing rather to take chances than to resort at once to the six-shooter. He stepped out of Ma Murphy's dancehall and grappled with a man disturbing the peace by wild shooting. He took the man's revolver from him without drawing his own. The other dragged out a second gun and poured bullets into Tilghman. The officer died within a few minutes.

Oklahoma knows that a good man has gone to his rest. His body lay in state in the capitol building and men high in the affairs of the commonwealth—a United States Senator, the governor, ex-governors and many others—did honor to the quiet man who as town marshal, United States marshal, three times sheriff of Lincoln County and state senator, had served his country well.

Yes, Bill Tilghman was a good man. The boys of Cromwell will tell you so. They went to him for advice, and they followed it. They liked to talk with him, and if Uncle Billy said a thing was so—why, of course it was so. That ended the matter.

THE SPEAR OF THE VALOROUS

By JOHN BRIGGS

Tap! Tap! Deadly blowgun darts smacking against the bamboo curtain of his bungalow gave Lieutenant Dunne warning that old Lakei Zong had made his first move to sweep the whites from Borneo and restore the old head-hunting days

I

THE white man extended a sliver of palm fiber to the blaze in his alcohol stove, and conveyed the little flickering tongue of flame thus caught to his pipe bowl. He uttered a mild grunt of disgust and resignation as he inhaled the pungent fumes of the native herb. With his much insulted meerschaum doing its best, under the circumstances, he turned down the wick in the stove.

Suspended from a bamboo rafter, a malodorous lantern diffused a gloomy light through the interior of the nipa hut. Distorted shadows raced across the *atap* walls, along the thong-tied rafters, over the split rattan table, and upon the canvas cot in one corner. They were traced by the suicidal flight of huge moths seeking to batter out their lives against the lantern globe.

It annoyed the man. As he stared into the light, his bronzed face was firmly outlined, as that of a man not far past thirty, yet its youth was contrasted by hair almost white. Although the night was warm, a limp handkerchief clung about his neck and his shirt sleeves were pinned tightly, against sand flies and gnats. Turning to the lantern, he pushed up the globe with his thumb and blew out the light. From long acquaintance with native floors, his slippered feet felt their way sensitively, like those of a blind man, toward the mosquito-barred doorway of the hut. The structure rested on pillars, eleven feet above the ground. A trifle wearily the single occupant seated himself cross-legged before the opening and waited patiently for the occasional stirrings of the slightly cooler outside air. In the opening, a woven *atap* hung down to about the level of his forehead. Myriad insects droned without, and sometimes a listless draft hissed through the cane-brake. There was no other sound. The sky was black and overcast with still cloud.

Lieutenant Dunne had spent nine years in Borneo, serving under the White Raja of Sarawak. Lately he had felt the insidious development of an internal langour induced by the tropics and by monotonous dealings with petty native disputes and offenders. For the Dyaks had learned, during the past forty years, to carry all their complaints against one another to the white *tuans*, and to abide, happily or with reluctance, by the decisions received.

It had been three days prior to the pres-

ent evening that Dunne had come up-river to this deserted landing on the Baram. It was a village the Kayans had long ago deserted, believing it to be haunted by Antus, the headless demons of the forest. Only the hut he was occupying had been kept in repair by Chinese merchants. To this point he had traced Eric Hendersen, the Danish naturalist, who had proceeded up the river, four months earlier, on his way somewhere into the interior region of small lakes. Hendersen's boatmen had been Ibans from the River Rejang, enemies by blood and tradition of the inland Kayans, although since the time of their fathers, when the Sultan of Brunei had ruled the coast, there had been peace between the Sea Dyaks and those of the interior.

Hendersen had not returned, nor had word of him been received by any of his carriers. As to where he had gone and why he remained, the primordial solitude gave forth no sign.

Grave rumors had come to Dunne's ears, and he had sent four of his native boatmen back down the river for reinforcements. There were among the Kayans certain young men exhibiting tattooed hands—the proud head-sign, which none might wear save he who had taken his grisly trophy.

This report had come by Najui, Dunne's chief of native police. A young man of many virtues, was this Najui—a Kayan of unusual stature and keen wit, who loved to have peace and to sing the sagas of the ancient Kayans and the Gods of Arya.

Leaving Lieutenant Dunne alone earlier in the day, Najui had gone on up the river to his native village, the long-house of Lakei Zong, pleading that he might make a chance observation of value respecting what new deviltry that scallawag of an old warrior, Lakei (Grandfather) Zong, might at present be engaged in. Dunne suspected that something besides a desire to seek information had led Najui to the village of his birth; for he had brought with him unofficially many gifts of a nature designed to win favor in a maiden's eyes. Dunne's lips relaxed in a meditative smile. He had a strong affection for Najui.

But presently an odd nervousness began creeping over him, a sort of subsconscious suspense, something unplaceable, sinister. His teeth gripped hard on the pipe stem. He reflected on the strangeness which seemed to have come over everything in the last few days; over his four boatmen; over Najui, the cheerful framer of harmless lies. Lately Najui had been uncommonly given to thoughtful moods.

Dunne pulled at his pipe until the bowl glowed ruddily. Still the mood of prescience gripped him, irked him; and for no reason that he could define, his thoughts kept recurring to that sly old chieftain of the Kayans, Lakei Zong.

He reviewed these things drowsily, until he half shook himself to dispel sleep while he prepared to lie down. Then he was made aware of another presence. A little, soundlessly fluttering thing from an invisible source.

There followed a series of slight sounds like a finger thap-thaping against the fiber of the *alap*, a curious quivering of the curtain. A tiny, feathered shank fluttered down and caught in the mesh of the mosquito bar. It was a dart which had been puffed from a sumpitan—the reed blowgun of the natives. A little missile, innocent in appearance, carrying a death of horror in the poisonous sap of the upas tree smeared on its point.

As Dunne stared at the small shaft scarcely visible at the toe of his shoe, it warned of a danger that was monstrous, bewildering. From some position in the motionless canes, the glow of his pipe bowl could be seen. Only the *alap* awning had saved him. That, and the natural inclination to shoot high, which follows from aiming at an elevation in the darkness. Dunne's surprise held for a rigid instant, then his brain acted. He was still in his squatting position—his pipe still glowed. He surmised that his assailants' eyes must be fastened on that faint luminescence in the pipe bowl. Already they must be puzzled at the apparent non-effectiveness of their volley.

Carefully he took the pipe from his mouth by holding it rigidly and moving his face to one side, leaving its position unchanged. Then, squirming out of the doorway, he tried to hold the pipe steady by letting his arm extend as he drew himself away. With difficulty he managed to touch the foot of his cot with his left hand. It was a folding affair, spread at each end by sticks of notched bamboo. With infinite caution against allowing his right hand to waver, he succeeded in pulling the nearest stick loose. Slowly he poked it out over the pipe stem and then withdrew his extended arm. The exertion had shortened his breath. Perspiration poured from his face. But he was out of the doorway, while the little red glow still beaconed there.

"Phawl' If this blasted thing didn't

have joints in it," he soliloquized mildly, "I could keep right on smoking and prolong the entertainment."

He tried blowing across the intervening space to freshen the light, with faint result. Then a wind of more vigor swished through the matted lianas and rattled the thatching on the hut. The rush died away; birds twittered, and the lethal calm again weighted down over the jungle.

Pft-pft-pft-pft! It came again out of the ominous silence. The mosquito curtain flirted inward, struck the bamboo stem, dislodged the pipe, causing a shower of sparks as it fell.

Dunne was prepared. Instantly he uttered a scream as though in pain and mortal fear. Surely his cry must have startled the enemy lurking in the darkness, for it even startled himself. Then his sides shook with a suppressed chuckle.

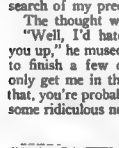
"By thunder, I did that well!" he pondered. "I wonder if this devilish thing can be getting on my nerves?"

He waited, not stirring from his position, meanwhile imaginatively addressing his unseen audience: "You're congratulating yourselves, aren't you? And now you ought to wait about two hours, until you think the poison has 'ketch plenty big white fellah allee same dead.' Thereafter you'll only have to crawl up the ladder in search of my precious head. Of course!"

The thought was revolting.

"Well, I'd hate to be the first one of you up," he mused. "And I'll hate to have to finish a few of you, too—since you'll only get me in the end, anyway. And, at that, you're probably good fellows with just some ridiculous notion bothering you."

II



SILENCE fell on the industrious groups that Naju encountered along the great elevated plaza of his native village. First, out of respect and custom, he must present himself before old Lakei Zong, the chief. Thither bound, his hearty greetings were returned with contemplative scorn, and his light raillery met darkening brows. If he was welcome at all, it was but surreptitiously evinced by a few of the younger men and by none at all among the young women, those upon whom the burden of entertainment customarily fell.

Previously his visits to his home village had always occasioned joy and much hilarity. He was a merrymaker, and one of unusual sinews for feats of skill and strength. Of the younger people he was beloved; by some of the older, frowned upon—although his office with the white *tuans* had hitherto demanded the respect of all. His rare home-comings generally netted him a challenge or two from young blades who felt they had developed greater strength since he had last defeated them in stick wrestling. Among them all, one called Bayik was his nearest rival, and between these two there existed also a rivalry more delicate in nature. As he passed by the head-house standing in the center of the plaza, a sharp, pungent odor entered his nostrils. It did not emanate from skulls of ancient vintage.

Abruptly he came upon Bayik, the stalwart nephew of Lakei Zong. Inlaid newly on the backs of Bayik's hands were tattooed designs. He had taken a head.

Bayik sprang aside, resenting Naju's affectionate slap.

"What! Is there no joy in my friend's heart?" demanded Naju. "Thy stomach perhaps has soured, lacking a foe worthy of taxing its rice?"

"No more than yours may sour," retorted the other darkly, "if you wear the white *tuans'* raiment in the presence of Grandmother Bashi Zong."

"So?" questioned Naju. "What then possesses the old mother?"

"The Antus," declared Bayik, modifying his hauteur a little. "She sees the headless demons of the forest at night creeping out into the fields. The swine will not fatten; the rice shrivels in the head; pestilence has come upon us. The long-house is accursed."

"Has that become the cause for taking heads?" inquired Naju.

"Make small thy mouth," snapped Bayik, glowering angrily, "lest it devour thine own head entirely."

"Thou hast the politeness of an orang-outang!" laughed Naju.

Leaving Bayik glowering after him, he abruptly turned aside and entered the immense inner pavilion of the long-house, where the families of the village were housed in common. Passing dozens of apartments, each with its busy occupants and its allotments of the season's harvest in separate piles, he walked hastily over the hewn slab floor until he came to a board-partitioned apartment in the farthest, dim end of the building. There he knocked on a door which stood open a crack, emitting odors familiar and rank. In the crack

appeared the face of an old woman chewing betel nut. Recognizing her visitor, she pushed the door wide, revealing herself much wrinkled and bent from toil. Her welcoming smile displayed a few blackened snags of teeth.

"Ha, Mother!" exclaimed the son. "Yours is the first smile to greet me. Look!" he said, opening a small bag, "I bring you rich trinkets of silk from the Chinese."

With childlike pleasure the old woman examined her gifts and hurried out in quest of her cronies, to whom she might praise her son and exhibit the tokens of his affection.

Najui divested himself of his cork helmet, military jacket and trousers. From a pole stretched along the rough wall he unhooked a multi-colored sarong. In anklet and armlet rings of brass he arrayed himself resplendently, shoved two tiger's claws into the lobes of his ears, and from them suspended rings which jangled sweetly. Into his skirt he slipped the ancient *parang* of his father. From its scabbard fluttered a bunch of scalps, brilliantly dyed. Adding beads to his torso and a head sash of silk, Najui completed his transformation from a dignitary of the white man's law to a superbly dressed Kayan warrior. Thus arrayed his second entry into the village pavilion gained him a more cordial welcome. He straightway presented himself at the central bungalow commanding one end of the great elevated plaza.

A slave girl operating a rice mortar and smoking a long cheroot smiled coquettishly at the resplendent visitor. He chucked her teasingly under the chin.

"Let thy grandfather master know that my time is short," he announced with an exaggerated swagger, well knowing that her translation would be, "Grandfather Zong, a tribesman begs humbly your pleasure, that he may enter."

"But Lakei Zong has gone on a journey to the long-house of Tama Dasing," replied the girl. "It is known," she added, with the sly delight of a gossip, "that he has taken with him the evil head of the white man."

"So?" questioned Najui alertly. "How comes a white man's head to bring evil instead of good?"

But the girl, suddenly remembering that Najui was a servant of the rajah, realized her indiscretion and was silent.

"Then bite thy tongue," Najui assented. "But let Grandmother Zong hear my humble vows of respect."

The girl, a creature upon whose plump shoulders the burden of slavery rested only in name, went hesitantly into the chief's quarters and, returning finally, indicated that he should enter. Her eyes had dilated with fear.

Squatting upon a mat beside a flat stone on which burned a smoky blaze, Najui beheld an aged woman, a mummified being, yellow, shriveled and dried. Gray hair scraggled down over her nude shoulders. The punk wood flames licked about a bronze bowl containing an old darkened skull and a simmering liquid which the hag constantly stirred. The sickening, steaming odor of the mess filled the room.

Bashi Zong sensed the tribesman's presence and she jerked up her grizzled head, bird-like and imperative. Into his there looked a face of which nothing remained save sharp and shrunken outlines and a pair of gleaming eyes. Her tongue rattled a gibberish unintelligible to him. Blinking through the smoke and flickering light, she grimaced at him with an insane craftiness, glancing sharply at his unblemished hands. With a quick flirt of the stick in her hand, she flung onto his bare legs a few scalding drops of the noxious liquid.

With a startled exclamation, Najui leaped backward. The hag cackled shrieklingly.

"Bring me a head," she croaked. "The head of a great warrior, the head of a chief or of a white *tuan!*"

She tottered to her feet, her back crooked forward, her wiry hair falling over the blaze. Like a little, old imp of evil, she hopped around the fire-stone, flapping her arms, stamping, craning up her neck to glare at her visitor, hissing at him. Paleness crept into the face of the young officer of the whites. He stood spellbound as the hag cursed him.

"The Antus possess thee until thou bringest me a head. Bajuo has entered thy blood with the creeping death. Bajuo," she cackled, "bring wakefulness to his eyes at night, bring cold fear to his days. Let no rest be his, let no peace be with him, until thy thirst be quenched—until his hand let fall a head!"

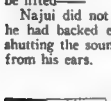
Unnerved in spite of himself, Najui backed away, and there followed him a laugh like the crackling of little flames in dry leaves. In a sort of horrified fear, he began his exit backward.

"Najui," the witch-woman continued, "son of the valorous Saminga, descendant of the mighty Saadji whose spirit still dwells in the forest, thy hand shall strike

down many. Thy blood runs yet with the strength of Arya. By thee shall our curse be lifted——"

Najui did not breathe with relief until he had backed entirely out of the place, shutting the sound of her ceaseless babble from his ears.

III



ADING dusk was already settling on the plaza, and the fires of supper-getting flickered from the doorways in the long-house. The air hung heavily with strong and sweet smells. Najui entered the immense inner hall, lit by torch-lamps and hearth-stone fires. The busy ones spoke to him more cordially, and yet there was absent from them all the happy, carefree intercourse common to long-house dwellers.

Threading his way along the smoky corridor, he came at last upon Nik-la-la cooking supper among her sisters. Her richly embroidered dress, her beads, and her shining bodice and anklet rings, testified that she had been expecting him. Yet her greeting was restrained.

"Tonight," he told her briefly, "while the old ones sleep, I will waken you."

"Let your betel nut be short lasting," she responded coyly, meaning that she would not sit up long to consume it with him.

Later, in the early quiet of sleeping time, Najui rose from his pallet in the head-house where swinging skulls overhead *click-clicked* throughout the night, and with mock stealth crept to the door behind which Nik-la-la lay feigning sleep, as decreed by convention. Noiselessly he entered.

Dying coals on the fire-stone dimly illumined the apartment in which his desired and her people lived. Najui stole to the pallet of Nik-la-la and lifted her mosquito curtain. When he touched her, the instant clinking of her ornaments proved that her sleep had been only pretended. Indeed, she quickly became excited over her presents, and her delight kept them chewing siri and betel a goodly time.

"The fire is dying low!" came finally a woman's sleepy voice from a distant corner of the room. It was the customary hint for the girl's lover to depart, but Nik-la-la did not ask him to rekindle the blaze, which would mean his dismissal.

As she drew away slightly from him, he waited expectantly and a little angrily, to hear her complete the command. But the girl was reluctant to do so, although she feared to have him remain longer. She was silent. He could hear her breathing rapidly.

"What has come over the old ones?" he demanded in a piqued undertone. "Do they find bad blood in me?"

"It is the Antus," the girl whispered nervously and with a shiver. "It is Bashi Zong who has put a spell upon us. No girl may wed a man who has not taken a head. It is even so as in the days of our fathers' and mothers' youth. The forest demons have come to haunt us; and the white *tuans* have no power over demons. No woman can now bear a child, save it be a demon, unless its father has taken a head."

"Nonsense!" retorted the young Kayan. "It is the drivel of old women."

Nik-la-la shuddered again and withdrew from his embrace. Then because she liked him, she added fearfully, "Will you join the war council of the young men? Will you take a head for me?"

"What!" demanded Najui, angered above a discreet undertone. "You ask me—a servant of the *tuans!*—to do such child's play? The curse of Jirong be upon this crazy witch-woman! Even this night she did attempt to curse me. And now you have lost your wit, also!"

Not caring if the old ones heard, he spoke loud and disgustedly.

"To ask of me so small a trinket as some man's foolish head. Pah! What manner of head desirest thou? There is the old Sultan of Brunei, whose doddering head hangs by the thread of age. Perhaps that will please you. Or perhaps a young man's head would be prettier, think you? Aye," he added with subtle inflection. "One occurs to me, even now. You shall have it."

Scorning further pretense of stealth, Najui stalked out, slamming the door behind him with a resounding crash which nearly splintered it from its brass hinges and awakened nearby sleepers. Here and there in the long dim gallery, sputtered a dozen or so palm oil lamps, indicating that there were as many householders up and out somewhere in the night. The outer plaza was shrouded in jet darkness under a starless, muggy sky. But beyond the long-house, in the harvested rice fields, leaped a pinnacle of fire, about which dark figures were circled, squatting.

Returning to the compartment where his mother maintained her solitary abode, he

hastily donned his uniform over his native dress. He did not disturb the old woman, whose heavy breathing betokened deep slumber. Through the little open doorway, the faint gleam of the community torches cast a weird radiance. Tambok baskets in which the old woman carried the produce of her toil, strange utensils of bronze and wood, walls woven like square lattice, plumed with bunches of drying herbs. From a crocodile jaw on the wall, hung an ancient war spear—a weapon of peculiar merit.

Long shanked and tasseled with brilliantly dyed tufts of human hair, it had for generations been a "calling out spear," used to assemble the tribes to warfare. As a talisman carried through the forest, it had summoned countless thousands to battle. It was a sacred challenge, and a trust inherited from father to son in the family line which had proved itself the most valorous of all the tribesmen. Even a head-man might not possess it, unless it were his by inheritance or by defeating in conquest the lawful inheritor. It had for generations been kept by the House of Saming, of which Najui was the last. None other than he could touch it, save by the right of greater valor. Now, without compunction he unhooked it from its resting place of thirty years.

Passing out, he felt his way down the rungs of a ladder from the elevated plaza, and his unshod feet fell familiarly into a beaten trail which led onto a frail bridge swinging across the deep cut gorge of a small stream. He cautiously crept through a dew-drenched plantation of cassava and stole forward into the open paddy squares beyond until the red glare of the council fire would have revealed him to the squatting war plotters, had any of them looked about.

Tautly Najui strained to his tiptoes, his left foot advanced. Testing his balance, he relaxed and lifted himself again, chucking the shaft of the sacred spear back and forth through his upraised hand. Each pulsing, tautening muscle of his body began running upward in a balanced thrust.

Suddenly the great spear shot into the fire light, trailing its long tufts of crimson scalp hair. It descended within the circle of seated figures like a bright meteor and struck quivering and deep into the soft muddy soil.

Almost simultaneously, a priest sprang to his feet, and with him two women—one, the shrunken witch-woman, Bashi Zong, and the other her girl slave. Bashi Zong and the priest gave Najui a hurried glance; then the three hastened off toward the boats at the river.

IV

AROUND the fire, the circled Kayans, glistening like polished bronze, squatted rigid and dumb. Their gaze seemed glued to the spear which had appeared in their midst. And as they watched the long, polished shaft, a white object came whirling like a disk over their heads. It settled, struck the spear, clung an instant as though attracted to the shank, and whirled to earth.

Amazed and suddenly galvanized into hissing anger, the warriors stared at the thing. It was a white cork helmet—a head gear which they long had accepted as a symbol of the white *man's* rule.

Immediately Najui, of the House of Saming, broke into the shocked gathering, a pivot for glaring and hostile eyes. Deliberately he picked up the helmet and put it on his head; then leisurely he pulled from the earth the spear—the spear which was his by inheritance, contested as yet by none. Gazing around the circle of angry faces, his lips bore a provoking smile. He spoke slowly and insultingly.

"I am much in need of a head tonight," he said. "Has the Spear of the Valorous a contender?"

Silence held for a moment, silence broken only by the insect chorus of the night; and then with lithe grace one sprang to his feet, one who was oiled and who gleamed like rich brass. It was Bayik. His eyes narrowed to a glint that sparkled green in the flickering firelight.

"I have answered," he responded slowly.

His torso heaved with passion. Deliberately he girded the skirt of his sarong about his loins and drew from his waist a *parang* of bright hammered steel and of concave blade. It was an *ihlang*, most vicious of all swords known; one which was capable of cutting two ways at once.

Scorning to remove his jacket and trousers, that he might have an equal advantage against Bayik's oiled and brass-ringed body, Najui drew his old *parang*. It was a strange weapon, with handle crooked at right-angles to the blade, a *parang latok* of the Malays, unwieldy by European standards. Yet for one practiced in its use, with a wrist like spring steel, the *latok* could have but one equal—and that would

be the blade in Bayik's hand.

"You have challenged a servant of the white *tuans*," announced Naju mildly.

A barbarous satisfaction crept into his face, and then his body became a galvanic thing which snapped aside like a whiplash. For Bayik had lunged.

With Bayik there were no illusions in accepting Naju's challenge. He knew his adversary was a stronger, quicker man, that he would probably be killed. Yet he might win, and he was determined that in taking the death blow, he would deliver one. Such was the incredible speed and recklessness of the Kayans that simultaneous death of both combatants often ended such a duel.

The spectators' circle widened out and rice straw was flung on the fire. The flame shot skyward, spiraling sparks high against the black, lowering clouds.

The two strange blades crashed in a bright hail of steel. Both combatants were men with the lithe speed, with the strength and endurance of wild boars. Parry and blow were impossible to distinguish. The two were the swiftest moving of perhaps the most active race in the world. There was motion loosed and rampant, assault transcending the conceivable, defense that seemed uncanny. It was a contest of indomitable will, insatiable blades weaving the pattern of death. Through it all, the tinkling of brass rings, the clanging of tempered steel. Against the desperation of Bayik, none of his mythical demons could long have stood. No other than Bayik could have for even a moment withstood the incredible assault of Naju. For one of them there could be no alternative but death.

Bayik fought with the recklessness of the doomed. The emotional struggle with death had mounted within him, and had been conquered, ere he drew his blade. He had stepped into the contest a master of every nerve, of every desire to live, of every delusion concerning his chances. Therefore he wasted no instant for defense, in which the chance offered to strike. The beaten dust underfoot became sticky with blood. The half of Bayik's left cheek had been cleft from his face without the onlookers having seen it done.

Naju's jacket was gradually resolved into shreds, red-wet. Both were exalted above pain. Twenty pairs of stony eyes looked on, seeing but two lunging, battling forms, and sparks from blades moving too swiftly for the eye to follow, witnessing a kaliedoscope of human anatomy.

The duel ended like the snapping of a cinema reel. Bayik had anticipated a fatal slash of the *latok*. Sacrificing his infinitesimal allowance in which to elude it, he delivered an upflung thrust of the ripping *ihlang*. A ragged gash fell open in Naju's jacket and breast. Then Bayik spun earthward, a lifeless trunk with its head caught underneath.

The victor reeled for a moment in a daze, blinking the red trickle from his eyes. He stared about him, slowly, until there entered his vision again the firelit group of faces. Then he strode over near the blaze, pulled from the earth the long shaft of the spear, and spat.

"Does no other challenge the Spear of the Valorous?" he finally questioned of the immobile onlookers.

The circle of half-naked forms became agitated, widened out in terror. No answer was made; no sound was uttered.

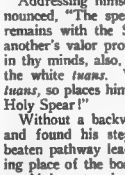
The gigantic Kayan gathered the tattered shreds of his raiment about him, inserted in its sheath the rusty *parang*. Then with a thrust of his forefinger, he singled out one of the gathering.

"Thou, Tama Kebing," he commanded, "go carry yonder trinket to thy daughter, Nik-la-la. And learn if the gift returns favor in her eyes for the giver!"

Addressing himself to them all, he announced, "The spear of the great Saadji remains with the Son of Saming, unless another's valor proves it his right. Have in thy minds, also, that I am a servant of the white *tuans*. Who turns against the *tuans*, so places himself at the point of the Holy Spear!"

Without a backward look he left them and found his steps in the dark to the beaten pathway leading down to the landing place of the boats. There he got into an old dugout and paddled hurriedly downstream.

V



IN THE suffocating darkness of the hut, Lieutenant Dunne sat waiting. He knew that a few yards away were sensitive ears straining to detect his least movement. By no tangible means, he felt that his attackers were creeping closer by inches. He caught his nerves tensing until his body ached. Presently he became conscious of the familiar ticking of his watch. It was something on which to fasten his attention. For

a moment relieved, he listened.

In a minute he found it impossible to withdraw his mind from the monotonous rhythm. It hammered, hammered at his brain. He hazily wondered how far one's normal sanity could stretch. His muscles clamored for action, and yet he realized that he could puzzle his invisible foe by his motionless silence. They would soon be expecting to hear his convulsive struggles, apprising them when the poison of their darts had taken effect. Dunne meditated setting up a racket to draw them on and to end the agony of inaction. How long would they wait?

A tiny spark burst across the opening, then another and another—a dragon streak of them, wavering, weaving weird aerial designs. A fiery column appeared out of the jungle and broke into a cloud of fluttering, brilliant luminescence. A swarm of great fire moths. Into the hut it cast an uncanny effulgence.

After his instant of amazement, Dunne calculated that this unusual manifestation might enable him to see some of his attackers. He edged closer to the opening, realizing that another instant might bring a new shower of darts. A slab platform intervened between the doorway and the ground. He could see nothing within thirty feet of the hut. Beyond that, the blanket of darkness held.

He quickly drew back. There followed the slight jar of an object striking the nipa roof. In quick succession he heard the thudding of more missiles thrown. Slits of flame darted through the roof and the crackling sounds of fire followed instantly. Reflected outside, he saw the glow of it, and then it had burst into the room. The palm thatching became a roaring blaze. As burning cinders showered through, Dunne reached over from his sitting position and picked up his pipe.

"All kinds of light now," he ruminated, absently blowing through the stem. "Guess I might as well smoke." His lean fingers pressed tobacco firmly into the bowl.

"All this trouble and suspense gone to waste," he commented again. "Wonder why they didn't do this in the first place? Oh, yes, they wanted my precious head without getting it scorched. And now I'll bet you they're expecting me to walk out. Well——"

His glance traveled meditatively through the doorway. The leaping flames illumined the surrounding foliage of palms festooned with shimmering green lianas, the drooping blades of tall sword cane, while here and there flashed from its virescent setting a jewel of white or crimson bloom. A chorus of disturbed night life rose with the crackle of the blaze. Beyond the neglected clearing, his glance leaped to the narrow path leading down to the river, his only exit from the trap.

Hastily scanning the interior again, he saw that the back part of the roof was caught in a roaring blaze which was sweeping forward.

"They'd rather have me come out the front way," he decided. "All right."

With an appearance of utter unconcern, he stepped out onto the porch, putting on his helmet as he did so. Standing there, he stooped and picked up one of the showering splinters, and lit his pipe. Then looking down from the edge of the platform, he saw standing beneath him, waiting with sumpitans bristling, a score of breech-clouted natives, brass-ringed and oiled. Their faces were upraised to his in awed astonishment.

Dunne's complete self-possession caused the head-hunters a moment of hesitation. He stood nonchalantly regarding them, without an eyelash quivering.

"My brave brothers," he finally addressed them, in Malay, "have you sought to destroy a demon's roost, not knowing that it contained me?"

His audience maintained a speechless pause, and then burst into fanatical laughter which carried a merciless note beyond the limit of reason. Some mad urge was driving them. Their movements regained the snap of determination. A scattering of blow-guns flashed upward to pursing lips.

"Here's how, then!" snapped Dunne, to the accompanying crash of his automatic.

His visitors vanished like apparitions into the surrounding canes—all save one, and a shattered sumpitan.

Dunne, however, did not misjudge what was to follow. He barely avoided a flurry of darts, by jerking up a slab under foot and dropping through to earth. He found himself in comparative darkness on a heap of decayed refuse. The fire was not yet burning through the floor of the hut.

"Useless fuss, damn them!" he commented bitterly. "They're past argu'n' with. What devilish thing makes a man want to hang onto life, I wonder? I'd like a chance to sprinkle some ammunition, anyway!"

But his assailants seemed content to wait, confident of roasting him out.

"Damn the delay!" he burst out finally,

between clenched teeth. "Damn your greasy hides! I'll get at you!"

He sprang out into the little clearing, his automatic roaring as he swept its muzzle in a half circle against the concealing wall of jungle. A quick yelp of pain answered; then quiet fell, except for the crackling of the fire in the tinder hut.

Standing in the center of the clearing, Dunne spoke with his habitual nonchalance.

"What is your wish, my friends? Let it be accomplished!"

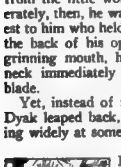
The canes shot forth a naked gathering. Their drawn *parangs* reflected the raining embers from the fire. A dozen furious and convulsed faces surrounded him. He flung the empty pistol haphazard at the grimacing ring. Like a scorpion thrust, a hot sting entered his shoulder, another his side. Two darts dropped to his feet, their points snapped off in his flesh.

"Whelps, all of you!" Frenzied by inaction, he shrieked at them in the Malay. "Be done with it!"

But a cruel enjoyment had crept into the distorted faces. There were many among them whom he had known as simple, peaceful Dyaks. Now their eyes were leering with some insatiable obsession.

Quickly he felt a numbness creeping up from the little wound in his side. Deliberately, then, he walked up to the one nearest to him who held a drawn *parang*. With the back of his open hand, he struck the grinning mouth, hoping to have his own neck immediately severed by the vicious blade.

Yet, instead of retaliating, the assaulted Dyak leaped back, and his eyes were staring widely at something behind Dunne.



IMMEDIATELY every pair of eyes turned in the same direction, while furtive wonder altered each expression. Grunts gave way to utterances of fear. Hesitantly the gathering backed away from him.

Instinctively the lieutenant wheeled to face this strange new menace which held terror even for his attackers.

Apparently as though it had sprung from the ground, there stood a slender black staff, flaming tasseled with human hair, dyed red. The source from which it had sprung was not evident. Dunne's tormentors were watching apprehensively a point in the wall of foliage, near the trail. And as his attention was drawn thither, there emerged by great bounds a man whose raiment was grotesque and peculiar to behold.

About his swarthy chest, and tied by the sleeves which dangled down to his gory loins, were bound the shreds of a duck military jacket. The skirts of a native sarong were knotted up about his waist, and on his defiant head rode a cork helmet, rakishly askew.

Towering a head-and-shoulders above the other Kayans, Naji shot out a great arm and snatched from the astonished crew a frightened culprit. He whirled his yelling victim, by the arms, once about his head and shot him feet-foremost over the upturned faces of the others, into the drooping canes, where he vanished and his screaming ceased.

Replacing his treasured helmet, short end foremost, Naji gestured commandingly.

"Who challenges the mighty spear of Saadji?" he inquired.

Suddenly robbed of their lust to kill, the Kayans regarded him with an odd mixture of fear and affection, of pride and besitant submission. There was none to accept his challenge.

"Truly," proclaimed one of them called Aban Ibling, a priest, "in the body of this young *tuan*, we look upon the mighty Saadji himself, son of the ancient gods who founded the House of Saming. It is so revealed to me this night!"

Brief exclamations of acceptance and of doubt were exchanged.

"My little brothers, where none challenge, none offend," reminded the scion of Saming. And without further words, he turned his back upon them.

With his short nose quivering and his jade eyes rolling, the priest Ibling fell to earth on his face seeking absolution of his gods. One by one, as though the dank breath of the jungle had sucked them in, the erstwhile head-hunters were gone. Aban Ibling kowtowing as he stepped backward into the curtaining lianas.

"*Tuan*," besought Naji, examining one of the headless darts, "show me thy wound quickly."

Dunne indicated where the darts had pierced him, with a dull absence of interest. The Kayan ripped the shirt from his shoulder and side, and he experienced no sensation when Naji's teeth bit into his flesh and drew out the poisoned bits of wood. He noticed that his servant's expression was slightly relieved when he had succeeded in drawing out first a little blood, then more, with his lips.

A crash accompanying the falling in of the burning hut, aroused him to the fact that he had been succumbing to a heavy lethargy. As though he were hearing it from a great distance, he became conscious of Najui's utterances.

"The poison enters thy blood slowly. The juice of the upas has been weakened because the air has touched it. Thy servant prays."

There followed an interminable period of stupor through which Dunne had only the consciousness of a nightmare. The light dimmed as the hut burned low, and then it was extinguished in a hissing downpour of rain. Through it all, like a victim of delirium, he seemed to be fighting the clutches of a furious, scourging monster, an unseen mauler of his body, one that thrashed his naked skin with some instrument of torture; rolling him over and over throughout long hours of agony wherein he screamed with the racking desire to rest, to slip forever into the black gulf of torpor.

Finally he was forced against his will back into a world of daylight and dampness. Clear morning was arousing its bird song through the dripping jungle. Into his nostrils floated the honeyed fragrance of tiger orchids which clung to the leafy panoply above.

Slowly he became aware of the earnest face of Najui peering down into his. The Kayan's features were weary and pallid from loss of blood. But he grinned happily when he saw life returning to his beloved master.

"Happy is thy servant," he murmured. "Great Jirong has heard his prayer. The *tuan* lives!"

Then the descendant of the valorous Samings slumped forward onto his face.

VI

AT TWILIGHT, the boatmen coming up the river in three long praus saw, lying on the vine roofed bank of the stream, both their master and their beloved head-man. They were Dyak police, hearty fellows and well accustomed to their office. Shouting clatter arose as they nosed their craft into the soft mud of the landing.

Dunne sat up and gazed dizzily at the boats while the separate crews exchanged good-natured banter. He saw the grinning face of little Taping Bueling, his machine-gunner, who had mounted one of his precious guns at the stem and the stern of his prau.

But there followed an instant hush of consternation, when the boatmen clambering ashore observed that the great form of the Kayan remained still inert on the sand, and that their lieutenant climbed very unsteadily to his feet.

"What has befallen thee, *Tuan?*" entreated Bueling, as he hurried to steady his master on his feet.

"A few Antus have infested this place," returned Dunne, laughing wanly at the consternation which his words drew from all.

"We must move on by night," he commanded, "until we reach Tatow, the longhouse of Tama Dasing, and there we may find more of these Antus."

The grin reappeared on Bueling's face. "Surely, yes, *Tuan,*" he responded in English, with which the other members of the crew were not so thoroughly conversant, "it is true; except that the *tuan* does not believe in the demons he speaks of. So I think he has in mind some demons of the flesh. Maybe it is to them some little guntalk he moah bettah."

Dunne responded in English, to prevent the others from overhearing.

"We may not need the guns," he said. "It will be enough to arrest Lakei Zong, if we can do it without bloodshed. He's somewhere at the bottom of this trouble. Najui thinks he already has a white man's head. And I'm pretty much afraid it's Hen——"

Dunne bit off the word suddenly, on hearing a low breathless exclamation uttered by some one in the central canoe. The voice was unmistakably feminine and of a timbre too rich for native speech. Glancing in amazement from Bueling to the prau, he saw someone that his first casual glance had missed in the shadows beneath the awning. It was a girlishly pretty figure, clad in white sailor jacket, duck trousers and leggings. She was holding an enormous Malay sun hat in her hand, as she scrambled along the bottom of the boat and leaped ashore with graceful agility. Her uncovered head displayed exquisite hair of amber which caught the twilight rubescently.

The lieutenant had seen very few white women in nine years. He experienced an overwhelming sense of wonder, as though from his solitary fancies had emerged a vision that could not be. Suddenly robbed of speech, he found himself staring

at her. It seemed to him that he had never seen such a vital creature as this girl who was impulsively hastening to him.

Perhaps his amazement amused her a little, for the flicker of a smile lightened her expression, which had been one of horrified dismay.

Then Dunne abruptly realized that, whoever she might be, the girl's apprehensiveness had resulted from his conversation with Bueling. Her immediate torrent of questions fully aroused his paralyzed wit, and before answering her, he had time to inwardly curse his folly in not having spoken the Malay instead of English. In her impulsive rush of words, only the occasional twisting of a verb betrayed that the English was not her native tongue.

"Oh, tell me who you mean?" she entreated. "Of whom you speak about, when you—you think he is killed? Oh, I must with you go! May I not? But I shall, I shall!"

She caught her hands to her breast, and continued before Dunne could find anything to say.

"I—I am coming to look for papa." Her eyes, that were like the amber of her hair, implored mutely, flamingly, as the rich coloring left her face.

She broke off, searching his face, while the lieutenant stood dumbly trying to collect his faculties for some reply. His weakened condition became apparent to her, and she glanced at Naji, who had come apparently to life and was sitting up testing his bandages and observing her curiously.

"You have been hurt!" she exclaimed, clutching Dunne's sleeve impetuously. "Tell me, what is it has happened?"

"Oh, I think, not much," answered Dunne, his shyness vanishing before her own distress. "The Kayans are all worked up over some crazy superstition. I don't know just what it is. There's been a little trouble, and— I don't think you should go any farther. It's, well—" he forced a smile which he hoped would allay her fears—"probably nothing serious. But it might not be quite safe, just now, I mean, for you to go on. I can send the boatmen back."

The girl's quick exclamation cut him off.

"Safe!" she cried. "I should not care to be safe when I know not what has happen. I *must* know! Please, cannot you see, Lieutenant Dunne? I must find him. I cannot bear not to know. I am not afraid."

While Dunne was trying to concoct some lie which might distract her without increasing her misgivings, she drew from her waist a little pearl-handled revolver. With an expressive little gesture, she indicated her breast.

"You see," she smiled, with a grimness which shot a pain through the man, "I can do—so!"

An involuntary damn escaped the lieutenant's blue lips. He felt a rush of instinctive dread against letting this courageous girl rush headlong into what unspeakable horrors might await. As he struggled to command the situation, his old training of rigorous convention inadvertently entered his head.

"But you will be going all the way with"—he waved his hand helplessly—"with just men!" He finished lamely, feeling like a cad.

The girl's large eyes contemplated him a moment steadily, condemningly.

"Yes, I believe that is true," she responded finally, "I know that these Dyak boys are men. And I had hoped that you would be, Lieutenant Dunne."

"Confound it!" exclaimed that confused officer, while slowly the color came into his face as he looked at her with a certain intentness in which sternness vied with a peculiar tenderness.

The girl's color mounted, too, under his intense scrutiny.

"As you wish," he consented at last. "And may God help you, Miss Henderson."

With a quaint little gesture, she held out her hand to him. There was a confidence and warmth in the action, as though she would make amends for cutting him in a speech which had simply aimed to gain her object.

"Thank you," she said, simply.

FROM the sand the long form of the erstwhile sleeper gathered itself up, and Naji, voicing a goodly Kayan oath, balanced himself by the mighty spear of Saadji. The others clacked their tongues delightedly, on witnessing that he was not utterly disabled.

"Verily, these sand flies and demons are a pest!" he snorted. "I swear some day to clear the forest of them all. They become annoying to a man who seeks only to have peace—" He broke off, sniffing the air inquisitively. "My nose tells me of boiling rice," he asserted emphatically. "Let my

belly be filled with food," he shouted, as he crawled in under the awning, "and I may surely kill some of these Antus yet!"

Bueling hastened to carry the girl and Dunne bronze bowls of rice and fish, with curry wrapped in plantain leaves.

"We may as well rest here while we eat this," Dunne told his companion, while Bueling placed little mats for them to sit on.

"And after yonder craven has stuffed himself," he directed Bueling, unconsciously letting his speech slip into the Malay, "let us move on, silently, so that there shall not be heard the whisper of a paddle."

A bantering retort from Najui, and subdued laughter of the others followed the order.

While they were eating, Dunne explained to the girl something of what had taken place, hoping not to frighten her, and yet to let her know that they were dealing with more than child's play.

Falling darkness aroused the shrill chorus of cicadas in the forest banyan and filled the still air with the fragrance of orchid bloom. The clatter of night life, the muffled drumming of some exploring orang-outang, and from down the river the intermittent rumbling of a bull crocodile, cadenced the night with a restless medley. The girl sketched briefly her nomadic life with her father.

"I was really raised in America," she explained. "But I like to travel with father. Papa—" she hesitated—"papa *is* almost without a country. He was born in Denmark; but really, sometimes I think he forgets. Sometimes I feel so lost—" She tossed her hands in a graceful gesture. "When we are in the Sahara, Arabia, Mongolia, China, India—oh, everywhere!—and he speaks always the local tongue. Even he forgets, sometimes, when he is speaking to me."

"You go with him everywhere?" exclaimed Dunne.

"Oh, yes. Except when he makes just a short trip into some interior that is very rough. This time I waited in Kuching. And then—so long it has been! I could not bear to think what might have happened. And I came to Baram. Your boats were just starting up the river, and so— I am here," she finished expressively.

A little pause followed, and Dunne noted remorsefully how she had persisted in referring to her father in the present tense. She was determined not to accept the thought that his wanderings might have been terminated forever. He felt a great reluctance to let this impetuous, warm-hearted girl accompany him and make him a witness to her possible heart-rending grief, or to lead her on a hopeless mission which might end in a climax more horrible. He closed his eyes to shut out the shadowy outlines of her eager face. She was speaking again. He had missed some of the words.

"Now he is collecting for the Smithsonian—" Then noticing that his attention had lapsed for the instant, she abruptly switched her theme. "And you," she said, "you are Irish, of course?"

He brought himself back with a jerk, then chuckled.

"Sure, and how did you know?" he demanded.

He could see the white flash of her arms, as her hands came together delightedly.

"Your eyes!" she laughed.

"I think you're a witch!" he retorted, catching her spirit. "How do one's eyes tell his race?"

"Must I tell you?" she inquired archly. "But, yes, I shall. It is dark, so you can blush! So many eyes are blue; but true Irish eyes are warm and deep, like the tropic seas, and full of dreams. That is how I know, Mr. Dunne; you have seen the fairies!"

"Never a one until this very night!" the lieutenant immediately retorted.

As he started painfully to his feet, the girl sprang up and offered him her hand. The whole-hearted act was so unexpected that his response was awkward and gave her none of his weight to lift. Never had he dreamed that a woman could be so delightfully compahionable, without the slightest trace of coquetry. She chided him laughingly for his clumsiness. Rapidly his little conventional hesitancies were falling under her wholesome magic. Yet he sensed that her moment of gaiety was only the accomplishment of a nature so rich in emotion that each changing moment demanded its expression of feeling.

Presently the boatmen had slipped noiselessly into their places, and Dunne with Najui boarded the prau which Bueling commanded. The girl entered the one in which she had come.

"So comfortable they have made it for me," she explained. And Dunne knew that she wanted to be alone with her thoughts, her hopes and her fears. No words of his could aid that courageous nature in fortifying itself against the unknown awaiting them.

VII

IN THE village of Tama Dasing, whither Dunne and his native police were bound in search of some trace of the missing Eric Hendersen, sat Lakei Zong and Tama Dasing, the two greatest chiefs of the Kayan. They squatted in front of the head-house, on the long-porch, and mixed betel and siri in the betel bowl. They mixed and chewed, mixed and chewed, for hours without a word, while huge cockroaches crawled out and investigated the silent twain.

It was midday by the blazing sun. Out of the jungle, like the breath of a blow snake, puffed a mucky breeze, puffed out from the fetid swamp, fell flat on the clearing, struck against the long-house, shivered and was dead. The sword and the tree fern drooped, choked in miasmic calm. From the mangroves a kariak screamed protestingly, whimpered and was still.

Yet the two old men squatted, mixed, and chewed; and made no sound. Their ears tingled with silence, with the brooding calm, with an evil hush. From the refuse heap under Tama's house sounded a snapping of teeth and the snoring of a contented shoat.

Finally Lakei Zong, the older of the pair, paused in his chewing and cursed by the god of death and of life; then he sucked through the blackened snags of his teeth and blew out the two beard prongs that trailed from his upper lip. Rare, were these beard prongs, and white, save where trickled the betel juice. His two beady eyes leered out of his weazened face, a clownish face like a scalloped corpse, a dead face, except for the snakish eyes that peered out of it.

They were alert, these two chiefs; they were waiting. Just now the bird of prophesy, the kariak in the mangroves, had screamed upon the left hand—an ill omen. They were waiting for it to be answered on the right hand, thus rendering the omen favorable. Also they had waited since the day before, when the doubtful cry of the kunshing had interrupted their transaction. For business could not proceed after this bird of doubt had spoken, it must wait for a definite sign of good or ill. The two chiefs had been about to exchange a pair of heads. A strange trade, the head of a man for the head of an ape.

It was Lakei Zong who had brought with him a head of great rarity. It was a treasure meant to kindle the lust for possession in Tama Dasing. A head tawny crowned and red bearded, the head of a mad white man, who had spent his time so foolishly wandering about in the jungle, gathering useless plants. The crafty old Lakei knew the weakness of Tama Dasing for collecting heads old and new, ancient heads of legendary "great ones," and all heads that he could acquire without violence; for Tama was a hobbyist, only, and sought to live pleasantly, without exertion. Lakei Zong now wished to win Tama Dasing to a certain scheme, and he was craftily offering this peculiar exchange as a bribe. For the orang-outang's head was worthless to him, worthless to anybody except such an ardorous collector as Tama Dasing.

Lakei Zong was angling for Tama's support in a crusade against the white rajas. Lakei was a smoldering ember of the past age, and he had been in conference with the Malay sultan of Brunei. It was this decadent sultan who had dreamed dreams of renewed power—an old man seeing visions in rice wine and the long pipe. In past days the Kayans had been allies of his throne, and now to win them again to his scheme, he had promised Lakei Zong many honors, among them the renewed privilege of his people to hunt heads—that is, provided the heads should be taken only from people who did not amount to much, such as the Sea Dyaks and Punans of the forest, or, just to begin with, perhaps, the white *tuans*. Since a white man's head was more valued than them all, Lakei Zong had already taken this one. Incidentally thereby he hoped to convince Tama that the new order was already working. Also he hoped to make it the object for a bribe.

Accompanying Lakei to this village were many of his select counselors and priests, who were already arguing successfully with Tama's people, to the effect that they had never had any good fortune since the white *tuans* had forced their ancestors to relinquish head-hunting. And just recently arrived was Bashi Zong, an accomplished distiller of mischief. Now old Lakei had nearly won Tama Dasing, by promising him personal ease in the matter, for Tama was fat and shuddered at violence. But the doubtful bird had halted them. Therefore he cursed, after waiting some time.

As if answering his imprecation, there sounded suddenly from the jungle, to the right hand, the querulous reply of the kariak's mate. Thus with the propitious omen fulfilled, their transaction could proceed,

after some days of hesitation and betel nut.

Tama Dasing twisted his head around on his shoulders and ponderously regarded Lakei Zong. He was a light yellow, stout little man, wearing a scarlet sarong which was blocked about its edges with black squares. Once a piece of his upper lip had been whacked out, leaving a gap like an inverted V, through which a canine tooth projected.

"You seek a fair bargain, Grandfather Zong," he lisped through his broken lip, "except it is known that Takei Zong never speaks what he has in mind to perform. It occurs to me that with a white man's head hanging in my head-house, I need some assurance that the thing shall not be revealed to the white *tuans*, in case you should have a chance to do so at a profit. Speak I not the truth?"

The wily, squint-eyed Lakei Zong clacked his teeth and lips together as though in worthy appraisal of an old rival.

"Thou takest council of a wise tongue, Tama," he responded. "I had not thought it of you, and I am thus not prepared with untruths by which to deceive you. Therefore I must make it known to you, verily, that there shall remain no white *tuans* in our land. There are so few that they cannot possibly overcome us. And there can be no doubt, since my young men are fully bewitched until they have all taken heads. Even now the head is taken from the foolish young *tuan* who has come up the river. The sultan has risen against these foreigners, and we have only to aid him in order to receive again the rights of our ancestors."

Tama Dasing blinked owlishly and drew back with a snarling awe in his face.

"And already has been taken the head of the young *Tuan* Dunne?" he demanded aghast. "You speak like a man filled with *tauk*. When was this thing done?"

"In the night following the same day that I came here," responded Lakei. "It was known before I left, that the young *tuan* was down the river from my village, and he was alone, with only the lovesick fool Naji, who was expected, even with the darkness, to call upon one of our maidens. And in his absence from his master, it was arranged with the priest Aban Ibling, to execute the deed."

After a nervous pause, in which Tama Dasing wadded in more betel back of his lower lip, glancing meanwhile sidewise into the head-house where hung the precious trophy in question, side-by-side with the orang-outang's head.

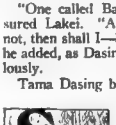
"Then it is done," he replied. "Truly a most precious prize will Aban Ibling hold." He glanced again, longingly, into the head-house. "Could I possess another like it, then would I almost agree," he ruminated, half aloud. "Still, I would not be pleased to enter into this warfare."

"Surely it is only need that the warriors of thy village, so desiring, take part," inveigled Lakei. "And thy prize shall be another handsome head," he promised emphatically.

"Yet others will not join," hesitated Dasing, "except they be called out by the Spear of the Valorous. And who shall challenge that away from this young Najui who is himself with the white *tuans*?"

"One called Bayik of my village," assured Lakei. "And if he should take it not, then shall I—by the valor of cunning," he added, as Dasing looked at him incredulously.

Tama Dasing blinked.



SUDDENLY from the mangroves, upon their left hand, issued again the cry of the kariak. It was this time a startled screech. An omen of warning, of peril immediate, imminent.

Fairly dismayed, they cast their glances whither the little bird had screamed. Immediately from the mangroves emerged a running figure, his garment tattered from thorns in his hasty passage through the jungle. Open-mouthed, the villagers stared at him as he bounded up the ladder and sank exhausted before the two chiefs.

It was Aban Ibling, priest from the long-house of Lakei Zong. He lay a moment heaving, his body caked with blood from scratches which he had not paused to avoid.

"The young *tuan* still lives," he gasped, at last. "He comes up the river with armed police. My task was not allowed by the gods. And Bayik is dead. His head fell by the hand of Najui, who bears with him now the Spear of the Valorous. The gods are angered."

"What!" screeched the weazened old chief. "What care I for the prating of priests? Who says the House of Zong cannot be rid of this fool young Saming who casts in with foreigners? Who shall listen to such drivel as thine?"

He clapped his hands.

Several sturdy warriors sprang from the groups that had been waiting in the shade

of the raised platforms for the conference of their chiefs to end.

"A craven!" hissed Lakei, pointing to the still prostrate priest. "Dress him well."

They fell upon the unfortunate Ibling and dragged him into the head-house. Wet lianas were brought. They were water-soaked and pliable. While he was held, these lianas were wound about him from his feet to his neck. As the sun and air should dry them, they would contract, very slowly, painfully, until they had squeezed out his life. While he was being bound, Ibling uttered no sound. Not the sign of feeling entered his inscrutable face.

A further interruption occurred while this was taking place. Another runner came tearing in from the fields near the river. His hand clutched his work parang frantically, his sarong streamed out behind him. His cries brought from the long-house doorways a flurry of excited villagers. Men quickly appeared armed with sumpitans and every kind of firearm that would make a noise and eject a bullet, however erratically.

"The *tuans!* The *tuans!*" he was shouting. "They come up the river with long boats and big guns!"

Harvesters from the fields came in hastily and commenced arming themselves in every conceivable fashion. They seemed at one accord in this. As though upon a sudden impulse, Tama Dasing leaped to his feet and entered the head-house.

"The young *tuan* shall enter my house in peace," he said, half turning as Lakei Zong followed him. "I have no liking for this!"

He reached up to take down the head which would surely incriminate him, if any of the visitors should see it there. But old Lakei had anticipated the movement. He struck Tama below the ears with the handle of his *parang*. Tama Dasing's upraised arms fell limp and his short figure slumped to the floor. There sounded a low Kayan curse from the dim corner where Aban Ibling was stretched straight as a log. Lakei deftly bound the hands and feet of the unconscious Tama.

Through the long-house spread a menacing silence. While busied with his victim, the old chief was developing in his warped mind a very nice plan. Leaving Tama secure, he entered the great inner hall where were congregated his own head-seeking warriors and over a hundred armed members of the village.

Running in and out among them all, he found Bashi, wildly busy with her medicine making, with her bewitching of them, so that every hand there must strike off an enemy head to free its unfortunate owner from evil curse.

He caught the hag by the arm and dragged her out despite her gibbering complaint. When he had brought her into the head-house, Tama Dasing was viewing the world with open eyes and disillusionment. Yet fear growled strong in him at being immediately doctored with the witch-woman's potent brew. It left him with chattering teeth and the look of a lost soul in his eyes, after he had been released. That the curse was efficacious his superstitious mind had no doubt. He was doomed to take a head—by violence!

VIII

THE praus worked laboriously against the muddy current swollen by the recent downpour. The river swept high along its banks, swirling through the matted rushes, the trailing lianas, and the odd pink moss, which, clinging to its roots in the sod, floated out on the water like flaming yards of Titian hair. The *thrump-thrumping* strokes of the paddles propelled the long craft slowly, rhythmically, up-current.

They followed the winding stream through solid banks of verdure, glossy green, from which their passage drew the incessant protest of birds flashing every hue and fluttering in and out of the foliage like showering petals of bloom. The stifling breath of noonday engulfed all. Little rivulets of brine glistened down the backs of the paddlers.

Lieutenant Dunne knew that within that impenetrable verdant wall were *parang*-cut trails winding with the river's banks, the land passage from village to village. They were trails which no European could follow, lookout trails, guarding the river traffic. He lay under the thatch awning, through half-closed eyes dimly conscious of the movements of little Bueling, the gunner, squatting astern with the steering paddle, directing their landing.

With weary reluctance he contemplated gathering his faculties for movement. He must force himself, his legs, his arms, his fingers, out of lethal inertia, as though each limb must dislodge a weight of lead. The atmosphere was effluent with an emanation of lassitude.

The soft jar of the canoe's landing aroused him.

"We are not welcome, *Tuan*." It was Najui who spoke.

The boat was being pulled up onto the landing. The boatmen were silent about their work, shadows of misgiving flitting across their faces. The various river craft of the Kayans were beached above flood-water on a sand bar which led, half dish shaped, into the jungle. Beyond, through a wide pathway, could be glimpsed Tama Dasing's cultivated fields, in which not a workman could be seen.

When the boatmen had pushed the canoes up onto the bar, Dunne stiffly crawled out. He could not imagine that their arrival was unknown at the long-house, yet the ominous absence of the usual merry welcoming party continued unbroken by any human sign. About him the boatmen gathered, intensely anxious to begin doing something.

"We must not go with weapons into the village," directed Dunne, in their own dialect. "Better that you remain here, ready in case of need."

Little Bueling grimaced open disapproval.

"How shall we know if the master meets evil?" he demanded.

"The white *tuans* have always entered Tama Dasing's house as friends, Bueling. We must not show that we expect other than welcome."

Still the gunner was not appeased.

"Let the *tuan* arrange a signal," he suggested.

Dunne drew a short revolver.

"If the little gun speaks once," he said, "let every man of you rush in. But it shall not be, unless we have met with bared teeth."

Najui turned to the canoe and from under the dunnage drew the long shaft of the tribal spear. He shed the tattered remains of his uniform and stood in only his sarong and the bandages covering his recent wounds. The performance seemed to work in him a subtle change. He towered a head even above Dunne, and there appeared no evidence of lessened strength from his injuries. Oddly from the rollicking, care-free fellow of yesterday he had been transformed into a being of marked authority, of inherent command. Involuntarily the boatmen, fidgeting on the sands of the bar, gave deference by the hissed intaking of breath.

"Let the master order his servant first to enter the long-house of Dasing," he said. "Let the *tuan* remain unless danger threatens. For these are my people, whom I love, even as I love the *tuan*. And there is among them only one snake. For Lakei Zong is indeed a snake. In his veins runs the treachery of Malays. And the time has come that he should cease to rule my people. I shall speak for the House of Saming."

A positiveness rang in the Kayan's quiet speech which made Dunne have no hesitation in granting the request. Here was an opportunity to let nature deal with nature, and Dunne felt that Najui might wrestle better with native intrigue, superstition and rivalry, than he himself possibly could expect to.

"Little Brother, thy wish is agreed to," he responded, inwardly amused at the literal incongruity of the term which brought to Najui's face a flood of pleasure.

The girl, Altha Hendersen, unobtrusively joined the little group at Dunne's side.

"May the great Juwata aid thee, Prince of Saming," she said in faltering Malay, her eyes shining.

"Thank you, *Mem*," responded the Kayan.

Armed only with the great spear, he strode up through the wide leafy pathway into the open fields beyond and disappeared.

"I don't know why I let him do it," muttered Dunne.

"Because I am a bother to you," the girl answered for him.

Dunne turned to her, his face troubled. Her full lips were pressed firmly together. Something about the exotic sun hat intensified her look of accusation, as she lifted her face. "I will not have it," she asserted. "I have come this far, and you did not want me to. I know there may be fighting. Now you must not think of me as a hindrance. I am one more to help you. I can! I am strong. I can shoot."

Dunne could not give the command to get back into the prau which trembled on his lips. In case of attack her safety could not be guaranteed there. To divide his forces, leaving some of the Dyaks as her protectors, might be fatal to all.

"You are asking me to do something which is impossible," he finally protested. "I can't tell what we may run into. It may amount to nothing. Or, if these Kayans are all primed for a regular insurrection, well—our chances are less than even. The river would be a death trap, if we should try to retreat. I would give anything, this

minute, if you were safely out of it, Miss Hendersen. Two days ago I wouldn't have cared much what happened. Now I——"

He groped for words, as a man caught in a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. Her searching eyes read in his expression a meaning which made her glance quickly to the leaf strewn sand. The wide brim of the sun hat hid her face from him.

"It would be very, very hard for me," he faltered, "not to consider your safety above everything else. I want you to know that you cannot prevent me doing that. You are an impetuous girl, Miss Hendersen. You are perhaps a little too courageous. Excuse me, but perhaps, with all your travels, you are a little lacking in discretion. Forgive me, but I shall insist on being a little stern. Remember that you are under my orders; I shall say nothing more."

He turned about too quickly to catch the odd, half-amused glance with which she regarded him.

"Better get into harness," he ordered the impatient little squad. "We're being watched right now."

THE relief of the police boys was apparent, as they scrambled for their cartridge belts and took up rifles. Bueling and his four assistants got out the machine-guns.

As though the arming had been taken as a signal, there echoed from the jungle, between the trail and the river, a roar like the report of a blunderbuss. The sandy turf spattered up directly in front of them. Every eye turned apprehensively in the direction of the report. Behind a giant tapang tree arose a thick cloud of powder smoke.

"Don't shoot!" Dunne checked the instinctive raising of rifles. "We'll have to get into the open. Through the trail there, into the fields. All ready, let's go!"

They broke into the tunnel-like path at a run. Bueling and his machine-guns followed directly behind the lieutenant and the girl. Immediately a spattering of reports broke from both sides. The shooting was from the higher trees back from the trail, and as they raced through, Dunne realized that the fire was not carefully aimed. Even so, showers of leaves and broken twigs followed their progress pretty accurately, accompanied by the pinging whine of deflected bullets.

"Faster!" he shouted at the four Dyaks ahead.

A sharp native oath issued from the rear, a stumbling check to the running. Glancing back, without pausing, he saw one of the machine-gunners struggling to his feet, his hand clamped to his head. Another took his place. Now they were nearly to the clearing. Their first charge into the open would be the most dangerous. Once there they could take a position in the center of the fields and command all approaches with the machine guns; out of range of the Kayan's antiquated firearms.

As he had expected, when they broke into that field of cultivated cassava, a veritable fusillade opened from the rear, but still the little column maintained perfect order in its rush across the field. Dunne felt the drag of exhaustion from his recent injury. He knew that the others, and the girl, could make better time, if he should drop in the rear. He realized also, that by so doing, the enemy's aim would be concentrated entirely on himself. But they were getting farther out of range. Ahead three hundred yards, a little irrigating stream, bordered with mangoes, tree-fern and bamboo, ribboned through the gently sloping rice fields.

"Halt in the trees," he ordered Bueling. "Now race for it!" he gasped, stepping aside.

As he spoke, a ball struck one of the machine-guns with a ringing clang. Lead splattered. The girl's hand clutched at her throat. She had turned, as he dropped out, her face filled with concern. His look commanded her to go on, and he saw her hand fall away, stained scarlet. He fell only three paces back, and then a pair of strong arms gripped him and he found himself being swung face down across the shoulder of a little Dyak. He was borne on with such an increased speed that he knew the girl could not possibly keep pace with it. Then he saw that she was being carried likewise.

The shooting from the trees bordering the river ceased as they entered the little grove through which the stream rippled musically along. A little dam of stakes and sod banked the water into a still pool, from which proceeded a path that had been trodden clean by the bare feet of girls coming thither to fill their water jars.

The gunner who had been stricken to his knees, drew a sash to bandage his scalp wound, which included the loss of half his ear. Others bent at the pool to wash slight

wounds, and one offered the girl a sash to bind the ragged tear which her neck had sustained from a splinter of lead. She took the silken cloth with smiling thanks which proudly delighted the giver.

IX

SCARCELY a three minute's pause was allowed them in the comforting shade by the stream, when from the long-house standing beyond the further stretch of rice fields there came pandemonium. Irregular gun reports punctuating the ringing clamor of clashing steel and an indescribable clatter of yelling, the excited yapping of dogs, and the steady muffled donging of a great bronze gong.

Dunne was no quicker than the others in reaching the outer fringe of the grove, from which point they could see nearly all of the village. The paddy fields lay uniformly terraced up the gentle slope which reached to the long-house. Cleared forest stretched beyond the thatched buildings which stood clustered among banyans and tall palms. A brilliant cloud of birds rose startled from the trees. Over all blazed the sweltering sun.

"What can it be?" cried the girl, pressing breathlessly beside Dunne. "Are they fighting amongst themselves?"

"I think so," said Dunne. "We don't seem to be getting any of their attention. Something's surely gone wrong. What's that?"

A crowd of furiously clashing figures appeared on the high veranda of the main building. They seemed to be pressing outward to the bannistered edge of the great platform. At three hundred yards, the hazy atmosphere endowed the melee with the suggestion of an angry swarm of bees. Then the tense watchers saw a gigantic shape battering its way to the outer edge of the structure. In a moment, as though being separated from the mass, one by one, human beings shot into the air, clawing at nothing as they fell to earth. Now they could see the giant swinging a nearly naked man by the heels, crashing him into the heads of the others. That victim also shot out over the porch and failed to rise from the sand of the beaten pathway into which he fell.

"It's Najui!" exclaimed the girl excitedly. "Come! Are we not to help him?"

The same question was already perplexing the lieutenant.

"You?" he demanded.

"Yes!" she shot back at him, stamping her defiance. "What else is there to do?"

Before Dunne could collect his bewildered faculties, she had wheeled about and was running out along the path into the open. In her hand was clutched the small revolver. The Dyak boys, pressing eagerly forward, did not pause for their lieutenant's orders to advance. With a spontaneous rush, they raced madly after her, every man. In unison there appeared the glint of bright blades in every hand. Dunne's disciplined little squad suddenly had gone fanatically mad, firearms forgotten by all except Bueling and his four with the precious machine-guns.

Dunne was frantic to halt this mad race; a race in which every runner was bent on death or victory—a race which was taxing all of his diminished strength to remain in at all. Amid the quick frenzy of shouting, his commands to stop were not even heard. He was overcome with the futility of the effort, but continued determinedly in the hope that he might in some way stop this mad attack and save the girl. The charge was stopped in an unexpected manner.

From the long-house a single figure broke away. He was dragging himself through the dust of the path, on his hands and knees. Once he staggered to his feet, and fell, then crawled on. His runners slackened their gait a little, and Dunne was able to press forward until he reached the side of the girl. The approaching native had regained his feet and was running, staggering, but with increasing control of his limbs. He met and halted them.

He stumbled again, and fell at Dunne's feet. Struggling to his knees, he held up his hands pleadingly. The lieutenant recognized him as the leader of the party which had sought his head three nights before. Now his body was ridged with ugly red and white welts.

"May the *tuan* forgive his deluded servant," he cried in the Malay. "I have been deceived by the work of devils and a witch-woman. I swear, though I sought to offend the *tuan*, that I have been deceived. By Jirong, I swear the truth, else let me die. May the gracious *tuan* grant his sinful servant pardon——"

"It is granted," snapped Dunne, not very graciously. "Now what is happening?"

"Your Excellency, Master, they have desecrated the great spear of the Immortal Sadji, son of the ancient gods, who began

the valorous House of Saming, of which thy servant, this same incarnated half-god Naji, is excellent heir. And so——"

"Come!" commanded Dunne. "What is going on now?"

"*Tuan,*" gasped the priest, again catching his breath, "thy servant, the excellent Naji, the Immortal re-incarnated Sadji, is in single-handed conflict with these degenerate dogs!"

"What!" exploded Dunne.

"Yes, your Excellency, except that there are a few of better blood who have rallied to the Spear of the Valorous."

THE last announcement of the priest was accompanied with an increased rattle of musketry from the long-house. An angry cry went up from his panting police. There was no mistaking that they had become the target for this new firing. The priest sprawled forward on his face, an ugly red stream spouting from the base of his neck. Almost simultaneously a heavy explosion roared angrily from the thicket cover bordering the stream. Dust burst upward at the rear of the little group, showering them with earth. An antiquated brass cannon had been fired by their first attackers, who had followed them to the shelter they had just vacated. They were caught in the open, within the range of both points.

"Quick with your guns, back there!" ordered Dunne.

The sharp whirring rattle of the machine-guns, pouring lead into the thicket, was Bueling's response.

Only momentary consternation swept as a swift shadow across Altha Hendersen's face. Then her glance sought Dunne's.

"I'm sorry I led you all into a trap," she said simply. "Perhaps—if this is the end—will you forgive me? I—I was thinking about poor old father." The bare trace of unshed tears brightened her eyes. But Dunne knew, and the staunch little Dyaks knew, as she looked at them, that the tears were not for herself.

Bueling had stopped his firing to test the result. His habitual grin registered satisfaction. Dunne considered turning the fire against the long-house, before he answered the girl. Yet Najui and others were there fighting for them. They must advance and tackle the thing hand to hand.

"You could not do otherwise," he responded, returning the girl's gaze earnestly. "It is for us to go on, isn't it?" she asked quickly.

"It is the only way," he answered. "Hold them there, Bueling," he directed. And to the others, he commanded, "Now!"

Altha Hendersen had already started.

Evidently more of the Kayans at the long-house were now free to resist their approach. The firing increased. One, and then another of the lieutenant's little crew dropped out. Others cursed as they came on, and some received wounds without feeling, so intense was their wild exhilaration in fighting for what they now surely thought to be a goddess.

Except that these Kayans were poor poor marksmen with the weapons of the white *tuans,* the advance of the little squad had ere this been checked. Behind them they could hear again the rattling of Bueling's machine-guns.

In the mind that dreams, even while concerned with danger, there will stir fleeting fancies, sensitive thought-forms which flash instantly and as instantly fade, leaving their quick thrill of pleasure, their pulse-throb of hope, or their empty pang of anguish. All of this Dunne felt during the few seconds that he was running beside the girl. The streaming of her brilliant hair, the superb grace of her movements, the white fire of resolve in her sensitive face wrought for him substance out of the dim legends of the Amazons. There was the unreality of dreams about it all, the bitter warning that the reel would run out, that the chimera could not endure. And then the light snapped out for him.

X

ONE—two—three—four—five warm trickling drops. Of course. He had been hit—somewhere. It was the blood dropping in his face. Let's see, where had he been hit? He felt numb all over. They were still fighting! He could hear it, now, above the ringing in his ears. Where could he have been hit, so that the blood could splash that way in his face?"

The lieutenant wondered why it was so hard for him to open his eyes. He seemed to be lying on his back. Slowly he brought his hand up to his face. There was a bandage. No! Something soft, silken. Hair! Not his hair, surely. Oh, why couldn't he see anything? Why couldn't he open his eyes? He was shaken to tremendous ef-

fort. There was a glimmer of light—he saw!

He saw where the blood was coming from. But it was not blood. Soft, warm eyes were looking down into his face. Tiny drops glistened in the long lashes. There was a numb pain in his left side, under his arm. Now he understood—not a bandage, but hair; rich amber hair, and a little soft hand pressing it into the wound, stopping the flow of blood.

"Won't do—won't do," murmured the lieutenant, grinning delightedly. "Take this blooming rag I wear around my neck. I'll help you. We'll bind it around me tight."

"You sha'n't move!" commanded the girl, unloosening the scarf with her left hand.

Without wording her distress, she bandaged the wound as he directed.

"Now twist it tight," he said, "and I'll be all right. It must have been the shock that knocked me out—being close to the heart. It's only in the flesh, I think. You're sure a good scout, Miss——"

"Call me Altha," she interrupted him.

"It's pretty," he acknowledged. "Now, can you just help me up a little, Altha?"

"No."

"But we can't stay here!"

"A little while," she declared. "There isn't any more shooting at us. Their hands are full, over there. I think your boys are stopping them."

But she had hardly spoken when the defiant and exultant yells of the Kayans belied the statement. In spite of Altha's protests he got to his feet. They were standing at the base of the terrace for the next paddy square. The sod dam was raised between waist and shoulder high. Into that shelter the girl had dragged him during his minute of unconsciousness. They were fairly at the grounds of the long-house. The frenzy of the fighting there was unbounded, and the lieutenant experienced a sharp wave of remorse over such useless butchering.

Shouting, grinning, squatting to his knees and leaping, cavorting on the roof of the head-house, hurling imprecations into the wild melee beneath him, was Lakei Zong, clutching in one hand the scalp-tasseled tribal spear.

He was rekindling the wild frenzy of his own and Tama Dasing's warriors. Dunne's boys had reached the platform, but now they were being hurled back. Each second the number of the brave little squad was diminishing. Still Najui was holding his footing, with his handful of courageous defenders reduced to three. Dunne ached to give them his support.

"Will you stay here?" he questioned the girl.

"Y-e-s, if you want me to."

He crawled shakily up onto the terrace.

"I don't want you mixed into that, of course," he returned. "Now I'm going. Bueling will do as you tell him. If you have to, take him with you and run for it into the jungle. He and his boys can take care of you, I think. He's probably got the best of that crowd back there."

"No," he heard the girl answer, as he started over the terrace toward the path which ran along the staked dam at the foot of the squares.

From the long-house sounded a splintering crash, as over the rail spilled a writhing mass of humanity. The edge of the platform had given away. Behind him he heard Altha gasp, as the dark conglomerate heap wriggled itself out on the earth beneath. On the roof of the head-house, the maniac Lakei Zong yelled, and then over the peak from the opposite side appeared a crawling figure, his teeth clamping the hollow-ground blade of a *latok*. The lieutenant recognized the short, fat native. It was the ease-loving Tama Dasing. Unconscious of him, the maddened Lakei Zong still leaped and howled, in pleasure at the tragic sight beneath.

Then the crouching shape behind him straightened, sprang like a lash. There leaped a zigzag lightning of bright steel; then a round hideous object rolled clumping down over the roof and dropped from the eaves. There for an instant stood an uncanny thing, which then doubled up and rolled like an acrobat down after the first object—a headless trunk.

Tama Dasing, the timid, the peace loving, sentenced to violence by the witch-woman, had taken his head.

Spellbound by the ghastly spectacle, Dunne was brought to himself by the sharp cry of the girl behind him. He turned quickly and saw that she was looking the other way, her fingers tensely clutching into the sod of the terrace to her back.

He was momentarily thankful that she had not witnessed any of the sickening events at the long-house; for her gaze was fixed down over the terraces which they had recently crossed. He perceived what was holding her attention. Working desperately to straighten up one of the machine-guns, Bueling and a remaining mate were stationed behind a lower terrace. The

other gun was demolished and two of his helpers were done for. While their lieutenant had been unconscious, it had happened. Now, advancing confidently from the fringe of trees, appeared two-score yellow riflemen. Their uniforms were strikingly colored and bizarre.

"Some of the sultan's gang!" exclaimed Dunne. "Now I'm beginning to see a ray of light through all this!" He slipped down by Altha's side. "We're still in for it, girl," he said quietly.

XI

THE little gunner's efforts to fire his remaining weapon were futile. With only their revolvers left, the two could not hold their position against twenty. Doubling over as they ran, they came on toward Dunne and Altha, leaping dexterously over the terraces of the shallow paddy squares and drawing from the advancing Malays a spattering of shots.

The lieutenant and the girl crept to the lower rim of their own square to make what defence they could. Behind them the fighting at the long-house had calmed down to intermittent angry clashing. Dunne could spare only a brief glance in which to learn what was going on. But he saw something which gave him encouragement. On the edge of the broken platform stood a solitary figure, raising aloft in one hand the Spear of the Valorous—Najui. Then, as Dunne turned about to face the new menace, Najui leaped.

Bueling and the other dropped over the dike beside him and the girl.

"*Tuan*, they hit us twice with the cannon!" he gasped.

"Steady, now," was Dunne's response. "Let 'em have it!"

The wild grass growing over the dam concealed their aim and made their volley a complete surprise which struck caution into the advancing column. Two fell, while the others scattered and ducked.

"Come this way," directed the lieutenant, and the others followed him, crawling under the shelter of the dam a distance of fifty feet. "They'll rush us, now," he concluded, as he cautiously lifted himself to peer through the grass.

An orange-yellow turbaned head stealthily lifted from behind the other terrace.

Dunne checked his impulse to fire, lest he reveal their exact position. They were now unprotected from the long-house, where the still unsettled condition might at any moment ferment a fresh assault. He gave a hasty glance backward, as there sounded the quick thudding footfalls of several runners. Najui with three of his valiant little band dropped down beside them.

"We have nearly won victory, *Tuan*," gasped the Kayan, "but none of Tama's people can be persuaded to help us. We will have to destroy these other dogs ourselves. And then, as soon as we have done so, Tama's people will probably kill the witch-woman. For then they will no longer believe there is any power in her magic. She is making medicine for our heads, now, and the others fear to help us, lest their fate become what they believe will be ours. Tama Dasing is cursing their foolishness, uselessly."

"Eight of us ought to stop them," said Dunne. "They're coming—steady now!"

"They shall be halted, *Tuan*," responded Najui, as the four fresh rifles were thrust through the grass blades.

This time the Malays scattered and rushed each man for himself, zigzagging, doubling, dodging, with the plain object of getting up under the last terrace between them and their quarry. Thus rendering the defenders' firearms temporarily useless, they could suddenly sweep over the embankment and cut them down by superior numbers. Dunne realized that a hand-to-hand conflict would be painfully short in duration. As he methodically fired with swift, glancing aim, he twice grunted with satisfaction. It was no use, though.

"The cussed sons o' pirates!" he swore, not far missing the truth. "Anyhow, gotta give 'em a bad taste with the last peg!" The girl's shoulder touching his did not tremble.

With their ranks but lessened by four, the turbaned assailants ducked in under the opposite side of the mud wall, concealed by their very nearness. Dropping his useless rifle, Najui doubled himself over and sped some distance along by the terrace. In a moment he had leaped upon it, and there for an instant he stood, a plain target, his *parang* upraised.

Dunne's breath caught in an understanding of the Kayan's audacious ruse. He meant to decoy the attackers to that point, so enabling the others to direct as many shots as possible when the Malays should spring onto the wall to cut him down, thinking the balance of their enemy just beyond. Najui crouched, struck down-

ward like a flash, and dropping back on his side of the dike, streaked twenty feet farther ahead, sprang up and struck down again. The astonishing speed of his movements drew from the Malays an angry response.

Dunne's hand covered the little sunbrowned one which had oddly relaxed on the terrace beside his own.

"Courage!" he whispered quickly.

Instantly the girl's fingers tensed and closed fiercely about his. But the act was not a conscious one, for she had in that moment grown oblivious to everything save the strange apparition emerging out of the thicket by the stream.

"Oh!"

Dunne looked and for a few seconds lost his bearings like a man stunned.

It resembled a human being—a man, a wild man, or one gone mad. Followed by half a dozen Dyaks, who were puny in comparison, he was charging with gigantic strides, his beard lowered on his chest, his long hair tossing like a scarlet blaze. The tails of a tattered shirt whipped about him. A native sarong girded his loins and he wore laced boots; nothing more. Approaching by the path across the dikes, the seven rushed, clutching *parangs* that were dull stained by brush whacking.

Dunne was allowed no time to watch these unexpected allies, or to make certain that they were not foes instead. Startling was the girl's wild cry, beside him.

"Father!"

"Great Scott!" he gasped. Surely the long strain had shattered her reason!

Then, with the others, he commenced shooting at the yellow adversaries scrambling over the mud wall.

TURMOIL again centered around Naju. A moment later the wild giant and his followers had caught the preoccupied attackers in the rear. Brandishing his flat blade, the half-nude white man struck down the first of them before they could yell a warning. He leaped onto the wall and cleared with crashing blows the knot about Naju. And there fought the two of them, back-to-back. Snatching out their blades, the lieutenant's boys hurtled in. Firearms were useless in that mixed melee.

In the next moment the lieutenant found all of his strength demanded in restraining the girl from rushing headlong into the mess. She fought him frantically. He felt himself rapidly weakening.

"I *will* go! I *will* go!" she kept crying. "Oh, I hate you! I will not let them kill him! Oh, not now! Not now!"

Wildly she tore at his gripping fingers, her eyes blazing. She freed one hand and struck him in the face.

Still through a creeping haze of giddiness, he hung on doggedly. The dense white heat seemed to be running the world into molten unreality. Dull, tinkling, vague, came the sounds of the fighting. Droning bells, voices; darting lights. Why was he wrestling, seeking to hold this creature? Something oddly treasured, one he must save from this nightmare; a fragile vision that he must bring back into the waking; a dream which, if he could somehow hold, should be made real.

Was he mad? In the daze were running naked savages. He discerned them approaching from the long-house, bright blades glittering. On-rushing destruction—It meant the end. They would snatch from him this precious unreality, rob him of this thing more treasured than life. He must come back—come back—defend his dream until the last. Now she was no longer struggling to be free. Her hand was in his, relaxed.

But he must get up, run at these devils from the long-house, stop them. He tried to rise; but the girl would not let him—she was holding him, now.

What was this, he was seeing? A chaotic, crazy thing. Something swinging its head around, darting, leaping, yelling. It could not be—he must wake up. Tremendously he strained to wake up; yet the crazy scene only grew clearer. Surely he was awake now, seeing clearly; though darting daggers of pain were shooting through his head.

It was a shriveled hag leading that gang down from the village, luring them as though by a spell right onto his own men; and there was the shaggy, red-haired wild man. A few of the Malays were fleeing back.

Bashi, the witch-woman, clutching a hideous object in her knotted claws, grinning into its sightless face, cavorting insanely, half-squatting and jumping, then swinging the thing by its hair, grimacing with demoniac madness. Waiting, tensed, their backs to the terrace, were the lieutenant's Dyaks, Naju and the strange white man.

Again Dunne struggled vainly to get on his feet. His brain was clear now. He

understood the thing. But the girl would not let him rise. She was cool about it. Perhaps he had been the mad one?

Inhuman was the performance of the obsessed Bashi. No common flesh and blood, so near the end of its run, could have dashed and vaulted and whirled with such preposterous speed. The diabolic exhibition ended abruptly in a pitiful heap beside its grisly toy. Silence gripped the onlookers for a moment, then the Kayans broke into excited uproar. Two of them picked up the shrunken remains and carried them off. The disgrace of burning would be Bashi's burial.

Others tore off across the rice fields to intercept the vanished Malays and inflict sinister punishment. The rest of them gathered around Najui, and into his hand was thrust the tribal spear. Hastily pushing his way out of the babble, strode the grotesquely arrayed white giant.

"My little Altha," he almost sobbed as he came toward them. And then he spoke in a tongue which Dunne could not understand; though the lapse was probably unwittingly made because of his joy, otherwise so evident.

Dunne realized with a shock that he was looking upon a strange metamorphosis of the man he had known as Eric Hendersen. Altha had not been mad. Nor on close scrutiny was this man mad. He laughed heartily on catching the lieutenant's nonplussed expression, a look of delighted deviltry in his eyes which revealed the source of the girl's inheritance.

"My young scoundrel," he said, "you are the first man whose side my daughter would not leave to greet her father properly!"

Dunne became suddenly conscious that during the last few moments Altha had been kneeling behind him, holding him in a half sitting posture against her. The lieutenant began to stammer some reply, his face reddening in spite of its pallor. He tried to shift his position.

The giant lifted his hand negatively.

"No," he chuckled. "Don't try it. My daughter usually does not relinquish what she fancies. If I were in your position, young man, I should not try to escape. It would only net you disaster."

"Papa!"

The bearded man bent over and kissed his daughter lightly.

"You see, you cannot claim her entirely, sir," he said. "But perhaps I owe you a debt for ever seeing her again. I know her ways—some of which I'll warrant you've discovered also—and when I learned at Baram that she had started up the river; I can assure you I didn't wait. It was not a pleasant idea, when I discovered those Sultan's devils following you. You see," he whimsically added, with a gesture indicating his person in general, "my daughter has a fancy that her poor papa can't take care of himself very well! Now I guess we'd better get you out of this heat. I've a medical kit in the boat."

HE half delirious protests of the lieutenant were disregarded. He was lifted easily by the big arms and carried back to the little brook that trinkled coolly under the dense shade of the mangoes. Many of his own Dyaks were badly wounded. Those that were able, returned to the long-house and brought to the grove a number of the poor fellows for whom life was yet possible. The naturalist, who had hastened to the boat landing, returned with his case of medicines, bandages and instruments for the simple surgery of which he was capable.

Dunne would not permit himself to be touched until the greater sufferers were attended to. And to help her father, Altha left him, her face whitened with intense compassion, sole evidence that she was in any way affected. Watching her assured and deft administerings to the unwhimpering boys, he recalled what she had told him of having been with the Red Cross. And neither was there mean skill in the great hands of the scientist that had been so recently unmerciful in working destruction. When his turn came at last, Dunne marveled at the firm, pliant accuracy of this extraordinary man's work. Nor having done all he could, did he pause there, but hurried on to the long-house, where had begun the wailing chant of mourners and the death tolling of the great gong. It gave some inkling of the man whom the Ibans had unhesitantly followed to the very face of death. Having had revealed to him this side of the scientist's character, Dunne wondered that he had ever thought of him as having fallen a victim of headhunting. It seemed hard to conceive of him in the rôle of victim of any sort. Who that victim had been, was not yet clear.

Dunne lay in the semi-cataleptic stage of utter exhaustion, yet with his mind alert. With only a smile as she left him, Altha had gone with her father, undaunted by

what she might find there.

Only the ceaseless chant of the mourners was heard, and overhead again the querulous scolding of parakeets.

Man's little goings and comings were no matters of concern to the primordial life of the jungle. Silent and enduring were the lieutenant's wounded, and the voices of the others came to him as a low murmuring. Smoke of native cheroots hung heavily in the still air. There was calm; somehow there was even peace; and Dunne lay in forgetfulness of time. Thoughts warm with tender suggestions, which hopelessness dispelled, half aroused him occasionally.

Finally Najui broke into the shelter and kneeled beside him.

"The eyes which behold the *tuan* are glad," he said simply.

"And mine are glad," responded the lieutenant. "Have you not had your wounds attended?"

"Pfft! A few more scratches, *Tuan,* that is all."

As he had gone up to the village, so he had come away, still with the tribal spear. He laid the weapon down.

"I heard them loudly shouting your name?" questioned Dunne.

"Aye, *Tuan.* Lakei Zong is dead. Bashi, the witch-woman, is dead. My people know, now, that her medicine was bad. They are very sorry. They will try to make amends to the white *tuans.*"

"Were they not honoring thee, Najui, my little brother?"

"Aye, Master; I am to be elected *Orang-kaya* of all the tribes. It is their wish, which I cannot deny them. But I have no stomach for it. I seek only to have peace, *Tuan.*"

"Let us hope for that, also," breathed the lieutenant.

"Surely, so it shall be!" responded the other emphatically. "Thy servant sees to it."

"I have no doubt," Dunne answered. And the trace of a smile stiffly caught the corners of his lips.

XII

SWIFTLY and silently the long canoes swept down-stream through the high-banked jungle which admitted only a ribbon-like twinkling of stars through the trees overtopping the stream. Altha was still administering to the wounded in the boats. She seemed tireless. So great had been her relief over finding her father, that the day's events had not entirely robbed her of the spirit for little expressions of gaiety, in moments when she found time to be with her father and Dunne.

The lieutenant found it hard to keep his thoughts from running on ahead into the lonely stretches wherein her companionship would be but a memory. Perhaps, henceforth, the passing of long silences would endure without the antidote of languid unconcern, of engulfing tropic forgetfulness. Surely his future dreams could be only the frail shadows of one bright vision ended. For soon it must end.

The naturalist was speaking. Dunne could barely see his large bulk outlined beside him in the prow of the canoe.

"Why did you stay up there so long in the jungle?" Dunne had just inquired. And still his thoughts seemed to run on apart from his attention to the reply.

"Gustafison," explained Altha's father. "I found him at last; or, I should say, I almost found him. But, of course, you do not know— Poor fellow; he was erratic."

Vaguely it occurred to Dunne as odd that anyone could be more erratic than this Eric Hendersen.

"Once we traveled much together," the scientist continued, "and then he disappeared. It was in Cambodia that I got my last trace of him. Since then I have made a good many trips to places which I thought might hold some trace of him. And here I found him.

"Found where he had been, I mean. I found his thatch hut, which he had made with his own hands. He had lived in it for several years, and it contained one of the finest botanical collections I ever saw. I think he was trying to propagate a wonderful orchid, a black one. The Punans, who live there in the jungle, told me what had happened to him. They found his headless body and buried it. Those Punans, in the jungle, are very resentful against the Kayans. There will be more trouble, I fear."

"No, I think not," the lieutenant reflected. "The Kayans will be glad, now, to make almost any peace payment demanded."

From the stern deck, in the interval following, came the low sound of moaning. Past the paddlers, the girl crawled forward.

"It's Bueling," she said. "His fever is very high."

Hendersen fumbled in his medicine kit.

"Here it is," he finally grunted. "No, Altha, you stay here. I'll attend to him myself. You are doing too much, my dear."

"No, no!" she protested, nevertheless sinking wearily down beside Dunne.

"Poor little Bueling," murmured the lieutenant, with a hot burning in his throat. "God never made a truer man! And they're all the same."

"You could not leave them all, could you?" the girl questioned softly.

"It would be hard," Dunne responded thoughtfully. "Once I had dreamed of getting one of those wonderful little islands in the Gilberts and planting copra. I was going to save a few years' salary and resign. But—well, this thing rather got hold of me. The idea sort of faded away. I had forgotten it until——"

He hesitated, wondering why he should be digging up things, as out of another existence.

"Yes," she prompted, "until——"

"Why—" again he caught his thoughts drifting dangerously—"until you suggested the idea of leaving it all."

"Oh!" The exclamation carried an inflection as of interest withdrawn. "That is all, then?"

Dunne battled with an emotion which leaped up and clutched at his breathing. Could this girl who seemed to him so evanescently colorful, could she possibly be interested in his drab existence? Or was she playing the usual pins-and-needles game of a certain woman he had known years ago. Yet he was caught by an impulse to break her rôle in his impossible dreams and to have done with it. Afterward, there would always be some relief in the knowledge that it could not have been.

"No," he returned, his voice barely louder than the monotonous chugging of the paddles, "it is not all. I didn't suppose you'd care about hearing. You are so much like the flaming colors of a humming bird, ever revealing new beauties, as they are caught in new lights. Life for you must be like that, ever changing, filled with new wonders. I'm a dull, prosaic sort of fellow. But you—you awoke old dreams for me, and gave me new ones."

Hesitantly the girl's hand crept into his, so that words failed him.

"What do you think I could want, more than that?" she whispered.

"Altha." Dunne breathed, filled with strange awe, "you don't mean that you could—want me?"

"Can't I have you?"

A wild joy surged through the lieutenant and awoke in him an inheritance from his Irish ancestors. He laughed softly.

"Your father advised me against attempting to escape," he retorted. "And forever and ever, I shall keep his wise counsel."

TERRITORY OF CIMARRON

LIKE the State of Franklin, the Territory of Cimarron is given little notice in the history of our country. In 1850 a section of country 170 miles long and about 35 wide was ceded by the state of Texas to the United States because it was north of Mason's and Dixon's Line, and could therefore form no part of a slave state. Texas virtually gave it away rather than be burdened with what was considered worthless territory. From 1850 to 1889 this strip of land, known as No Man's Land or the Neutral Strip, and commonly designated by the stockmen of the region as "The Strip," was under no form of government and for a time became the resort of outlaws.

In 1886 land hungry hordes and restless adventurers from the neighboring states of Kansas, Texas, Arkansas and even farther away invaded the domain and squatted on the land as homesteaders. These settlers numbered more than 12,000 before midsummer of 1886. Many of the more ambitious ones met in mass meeting at Beaver City, the metropolis of the region, and organized the Territory of Cimarron, appointing a delegate to Congress. Congress, however, did not recognize the action of the people in the formation of a new territory which comprised what is now the Oklahoma counties of Beaver, Texas and Cimarron.

In 1889 the jurisdictions of the Federal courts at Muscogee, Indian Territory, and Paris, Texas, were extended over this domain, and in 1890 it was added to Oklahoma under the name of Beaver County. Beaver City, situated in the sand hills on Beaver Creek, boasted churches, schools and a live newspaper for a time. From 1886 to 1889 the population of the Strip decreased, many of them going to Oklahoma to take part in the race for land. Since then, however, it has again been settled with a more substantial class of citizens, who live in modern homes instead of sod shanties, as did the pioneers of Cimarron Territory.—H. F. G.

THE AMERICAN INDIAN

By ALANSON SKINNER

TRIBES OF NEW ENGLAND

Wampanoag, Pequot, Narragansett, Mohican—they are but names today; yet at one time these first Americans ruled the land that is now New England and tidewater New York; ruled it and fought for it, but passed on with the irresistible advance of the white man's frontier

LONG before the first Norse adventurer set foot on Vineland, long before Columbus landed on San Salvador, long before Cartier entered the St. Lawrence or the Pilgrim fathers came to New England—when the glaciers began to withdraw slowly northward over the eastern portion of what is now the United States, and the climate began to ameliorate enough for vegetation to spring up, and animals to thrive and multiply, small wandering bands of men, the ancestors of the historic Indian tribes, coming from the south, began to follow up the rivers caused by the retreating glaciers into the hitherto uninhabited country now comprised by the Middle Atlantic and New England states and nearby Canada.

These first Indians were possessed of a knowledge of fire, of the bow and arrow. They were hunters, but not agricultural. They lived on the banks of the glacial rivers, they inhabited cave mouths and dwelt under overhanging rock ledges. They camped near the sea and lived on shellfish. Of all these things we are positive; for in the river sands deposited by the retreating glaciers, especially near Trenton, in the Delaware Valley; in the extreme lower levels of the debris and rubbish that are found in the inhabited caves and rock shelters, and at the bottom of the great and deep ancient shell deposits, may yet be found the crude stone implements of this early wave of people. It is very significant that these implements, meager in number and in variety, are yet, as far as they go, identical in appearance—except that many are weathered to the appearance of chalk, and it takes many eons to reduce flint to that consistency—with the stone implements that were yet in use by the Indian tribes of the Algonkian stock that were found in possession of the land by the first white explorers.

After a time this first wave passed on, possibly venturing still farther north, and another wave of population, similar in origin, also advancing from the south, took its place. This wave—there may have been, probably were, several such successive waves—or the next one that is possible of identification, was of people somewhat more advanced in the arts. The variety of stone implements left behind shows that their range of types was greater.

Now come in the polished grooved stone ax, the wedge shape stone celt, but as yet no indication of agriculture. But, in the old deposits we find, overlying these remains, first crude pottery, then better ware, bone and antler tools, and finally tobacco pipes, charred corn, and other indications that agriculture, and a higher type of people, yet of the same antecedents, had come in. These were the immediate ancestors of the Indian tribes of the East of Algonkian stock, the Wampanoag, the Pequot, the Mohegan, the Delaware, and the Shawnee, and the Mohican.

Who the very first comers were it is idle to speculate, but possibly the second primitive group of hunters here described were

the ancestors of the tribes of northern New England, the Penobscot, the Passamaquoddy, and the Abenaki, and likewise of the Micmac and Malecite of Nova Scotia, and the Montagnais, Naskapi, Cree, and Ojibway of Labrador and Canada north of the Great Lakes. At any rate, the members or these tribes at present descend in degree of civilization or culture as one goes north, and approximate in the crudity of their lives, at the extreme northern range of their present day territory, at least the second, and possibly even the first, advance waves of human population in the East.

When the first whites settled in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, the Indian population was rather sparse, yet the tribes encountered were without exception of the Algonkian stock. Of these there were numerous small tribes and subtribes, but the most formidable were the Wampanoag, who dwelt near Massachusetts Bay, the Narragansett, in Rhode Island, the Pequot, near the mouth of the Thames River in Connecticut, and the Mohegan, close relatives and deadly rivals of the latter, higher up on the same stream, near New London of today.

The reception of the white colonists by the Indians was at first very friendly. During the first few years following the arrival of the Pilgrims in 1620 the Wampanoag ruled all the country east from Narragansett Bay to the Atlantic Coast, including the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. They are said to have had thirty villages, in spite of a great pestilence that had recently depopulated them, and their ruling chief, Massasoit, held them all strictly friendly to the whites, making a treaty of peace with the English colonists that lasted until his death. After the demise of Massasoit, the chieftainship fell to his son, Metacam, better known as "King Philip," who ruled without open conflict for nine years, after which, owing to the bad faith and ill treatment received from the whites, he deliberately went to war against the colonists.

THE campaign opened in 1675 and lasted for two years. It was waged with desperate valor on the part of the Indians, whose powerful bows were almost, if not quite, as effective as the firearms of the period. King Philip's military genius is shown by the skill with which he confederated the neighboring tribes and the havoc that he wrought on the white settlements. Of ninety towns fifty-two were attacked and twelve destroyed, and only treachery on the part of his own men saved the colonists from extinction.

Finally, a night attack was made against the Wampanoag chief in his swamp fort in Rhode Island, on August 12th, 1676, when, piloted by disloyal Indians, the whites surprised the enemy and defeated them with great slaughter, King Philip himself being shot by one of his ex-followers who accompanied Capt. Church, the white commander. The remnant of the Wampanoag were hunted down like wild beasts, and the prisoners were hanged or sold into slavery, or given as slaves to the Indian allies. King Philip's own small son was sent as a slave to the West Indies.

Tradition states that the surviving Wampanoag did not make good slaves from the white man's standpoint. A warrior race, they proved very dangerous to handle. Some, it is said, learning that they were destined to servitude in the West Indies, fired the ship on which they were confined, and died in the flames rather than suffer so great an indignity. A few only may have lived to reach their destination, and there may be some diluted drops of their blood among the present day natives of the Barbadoes.

A few outlying settlements that remained neutral, and some of the "Indian Apostle Elliot's" converted or "Praying Indians," escaped the ruin that overwhelmed their people; and there remain today at Gay Head, on Martha's Vineyard, and at Mashpee, in Barnstable County, Mass., some descendants of the Wampanoag, who have forgotten their native language, but who retain some few vestiges of their native arts, such as basket making. Unfortunately, like so many Atlantic Coast remnants, they are badly mixed with negro blood.

The great pestilence that desolated the New England Indians in 1617 failed to attack the Narragansett tribe, who dwelt in Rhode Island, west of Narragansett Bay, from Providence River on the northeast to Pawcatuck River on the southwest, ranging eastward to the boundary of the Pequot, at about what is now the Connecticut line. They numbered about five thousand at the outbreak of King Philip's War, but threw their whole strength in with his forces, and shared their fate. In the great swamp fight that terminated this struggle they lost nearly one thousand in killed and

prisoners, and were forced to abandon their country. A few fled to the Mohican on the Hudson; others went north to Canada and were absorbed by the Abenaki and other tribes under French influence.

A few remained near Charlestown, Rhode Island, where their mulatto descendants are still to be found. Others, mingled with Montauk from Long Island, Mohegan from Connecticut, and other remnants, went to their ancient enemies, the Iroquois, where the combined forces took upon themselves the name of "Brothertowns," selected English as a common language, and placed themselves under the protection of the Oneida, who adopted them.

When the Oneida, in 1846, sold their holdings in New York and emigrated to their reservation at Green Bay, Wisconsin, the Brothertowns accompanied them, and to this day some of the tribe may be found on the east shore of Lake Winnebago, at Brothertown and Chilton, in particular. Many still retain a notably Indian appearance, and seem freer from negro taint than those who remained in the East, but, except for their name and appearance, they are Indians no longer, having lost all customs, language and traditions of their people.

ONE of the last waves of Algonkian people to advance from the south into the Middle Atlantic and New England region was that composed of the ancestors of several of the most important tribes of the Colonial period, the Lenni Lenape or Delaware, and their kindred. The Walam Olum, or Red Score of the Delaware, a native record in song and picture writing, that tells of their migrations, speaks of how they arrived at the seaboard after a long series of marches and battles, and how the Mohican tribe sprang from them and occupied the valley of the Hudson below what is now Albany. From them it is supposed that a band broke loose and wandered eastward to the Thames River in Connecticut, where they took upon themselves the name of "Pequot," or "The Destroyers."

Just about the time that the white colonists began to arrive, a quarrel broke out between the chief of the Pequot, named Sassacus, and his sub-chief, Uncas, who broke away from the tribe and retreated up the Thames to the neighborhood of where New London, Connecticut, now stands. This revolted group assumed the old name of their people, the Mohican, under a dialectic variation, and became the "Mohegan" of history. Both Mohican, or Mahikan, as it is perhaps more correctly spelled, mean "Wolf."

In 1637, owing to the murder of a trader who had abused them, the Pequot were drawn into a bloody war with the English colonists. Through the influence of the famous preacher, Roger Williams, Uncas and his Mohegan followers were at first held neutral and finally actually engaged in the war against the Pequot. The war ended, as was usual in those times, by the surprise of the Pequot stronghold at Mystic, Conn., by a party of English and Mohegan.

At a little before daybreak the English leaders, Captains Mason and Underhill, surrounded the palisaded fort, and fired the wigwams. The Pequot defended themselves with desperation, but the heat snapped their bowstrings, and they perished fighting, like the brave people that they were. It is said that, though the fort was crowded with women and children as well as warriors, no moan, no cry, no plea for mercy, was heard during the short hour that encompassed their annihilation. Instead they went to the most cruel of all deaths defiant to the last, singing in their agony the death song that until the last few years was remembered by their descendants:

Yu ni ne ne andai
Ni ki pi ai
Ni mas setcu!

"Here am I—to the Spirit-land I am going—I shall pass away!"

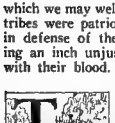
Being merely Indians their bravery has been forgotten.

Of the three thousand Pequots alive at the beginning of the campaign some few escaped. These were mainly placed under the domination of Uncas the Mohegan, and they gradually dwindled away; yet, annihilated as a nation, they steadfastly maintained their identity, and their descendants, perhaps a hundred in number, who dwell near Ledyard, Connecticut, to this day still hold the Mohegan as their enemies, although they have lost every trace of their ancient customs.

The Mohegan were more happy in their fate. They were able, through the diplomacy of Uncas, to escape war with the whites, and continued to remain at their

old homes until they largely had dwindled away. A few still reside near New London, and up to a few years ago they even retained some of their language, folklore and ancient customs. They lost some of their number who went to the Brothertown settlement among the Oneida, and thence to Wisconsin. Some also joined the related group of Stockbridges, mostly Hudson River Mohican, and likewise went to the West.

But the Indian tribes of New England who met our ancestors so bravely in the field of battle are no more. Their race is ended, their customs and civilization forgotten, and the plow has scattered their bones. Only their names remain as part of our American heritage, and a part of which we may well be proud. These fierce tribes were patriots to the core, and died in defense of their country, never yielding an inch unjustly without enriching it with their blood.



TURNING from the Indian nations of New England to the valley of the Hudson we encounter our old friends the Mohican, whom Cooper has made immortal. The people of the Wolf, or the "River Indian," as they were commonly called, were closely related to the Delawares. They were situated between the Munsey division of that tribe, and that redoubtable nation of the Iroquois, the Mohawk. History and tradition alike show that the Mohawk more than once were forced to give way before the onslaught of the Mohican warriors, something that very seldom was accomplished by any nation of the Algonkian stock.

In early Colonial times the Mohican had several severe wars with the Dutch, but they managed to hold their own up to the time of the American Revolution, when a considerable body of Mohican, under their chief, Nimham, joined the American forces under Washington, who, judging by his letters, valued them highly as scouts and soldiers.

On August 20th, 1778, the British Lieutenant Colonel, Emmerick, was scouting with his light cavalry near Fordham, N. Y., when he happened to run into a body of American light troops and the Mohican under Nimham, who drove him back to Fordham with a loss. The Indians, who were stationed in the northeast corner of what is now Van Courtlandt Park, bore the brunt of the battle, and were much elated at having defeated what they supposed to be the entire crack division under Emmerick. This was discovered by spies, and a plan was made to trap them. Reinforcements, consisting of De Lancey's battalion and the Legion Dragoons of Tarleton, were rushed to the spot, and the Mohican were complimented vicariously by the fact that the ablest of the British officers in the country, Simcoe, Tarleton, Emmerick and De Lancey, were obliged to put their heads togethter to defeat them.

On the morning of August 31st, the British moved and got to what is now Woodlawn Heights at about ten o'clock. The rangers and dragoons took post on the right of the road; Emmerick was stationed in Van Courtlandt's woods at the house of Frederick Devoe, but by mistake he went to the residence of a relative of the latter, near the entrance to the lane and road. The intention was for him to send a patrol out to draw the attack of the American and Mohican troops and then retreat into the ambush, and thus cut off the entire body, but his error prevented the accomplishment of the entire plan.

While Col. Simcoe was up a tree reconnoitering, he saw the mistake, but, before he could countermand the orders of Emmerick, he discovered a flanking party of Americans approaching, and, from a fence on Emmerick's left rose the war-cry of the Mohican. Tarleton's dragoons were rushed to Emmerick's aid, but they were stopped by a high stone wall, and had to go around. Simcoe, learning of this, succeeded in charging through the brush and woods to the Mohican left before they were discovered. The Indians, though surprised, again gave the war-whoop and fired on the grenadiers, wounding Simcoe and four of his men. But the Mohican were outflanked and outnumbered, and they had to retreat to the open fields to the south of the lane, where they were discovered.

Here the cavalry charged upon them, yet the Indians held their own for a time, pulling the cavalrymen from their horses and killing them with their hands. But it was too unequal a contest, and at length they gave way. Their old chief, Nimham, gave them the order to retreat, saying, "I am old and can die here!" He himself wounded Simcoe and his orderly before he went down. Colonel Tarleton, in attempting to saber a Mohican, overreached himself and fell from his horse, but, as the Indian patriot had discharged his piece and had no

bayonet, the colonel escaped. Eighteen of the Mohican, including Nimham and his son, were slain, but the remainder escaped, and the main body of the American forces under Gist were able to get out of the trap in safety.

Thus ended the most conspicuous service rendered to the American troops during the Revolution by our Indians. The slain Mohican were buried in a clearing in the woods, and in the northeastern part of Van Courtlandt Park the "Indian Field" still bears a rubblestone monument upon which the Daughters of the American Revolution have affixed a bronze tablet to the memory of Nimham and his braves.

Shortly after the Revolution the Mohican with the remnants of some of the other Hudson River tribes came together under the name of "Stockbridges" and like the Brothertowns sought asylum among the Oneida. To some extent they shared the fortunes of that tribe, and later withdrew to Wisconsin, where, on one corner of the Menomini Reservation a small body of them still remains, while others are near Stockbridge on the east shore of Lake Winnebago. They have retained more of the Indian in their appearance than the equally mongrel Brothertown people, and some of the old tribal names have still survived to this day, although the language has died out within the last generation. They still remember a few Indian words, and have in their possession some antique wooden bowls, wampum belts and other articles, brought with them from their Eastern home.

THE TEXAS RANGERS

"MEXICO could whip the United States—if the Texas Rangers would remain neutral!" That is a standing joke on the Rio Grande. But it testifies that the Northwest Mounted is not the only police-body in the world with a fighting reputation. That reputation comes from a long and honorable, if rather unofficial, history, dating almost to the birth of the Texan Republic.

For years after San Jacinto, the territory west of San Antonio was labelled the "Range of the Comanche Indians." Besides the red men, there were fugitive criminals, dishonest bankrupts (who had chalked the mystic "G. T. T." upon their shutters—"Gone to Texas"—and left their creditors to read), desperadoes of all sorts. Mexican raiders crossed the river to escape Mexican justice. So Sam Houston commissioned a daredevil young surveyor, John Coffee Hays, to raise a company for the pursuit and removal of Indians and criminals. He was to follow them wherever he liked—orders which seem remembered by Rangers to-day!

Applicants, by Jack Hays's demand, must possess courage, be unerring shots and, in a day of cheap horseflesh, own a horse worth at least one hundred dollars. Each Ranger was paid a dollar a day, but a fair proportion lived through only a few paydays, gambling, as they did, almost hourly with their lives. They dressed in buckskin and wore three or four revolvers and as many bowie-knives; they carried short rifles across their arms and rode like—Texas Rangers.

Against marauding Indians or white or brown desperadoes, they would take the trail at any time. Since they carried no baggage, could subsist on game if necessary, they struck flashingly and hard. Their very name became a terror to criminals. Of all their battles, that of Captain Bird and thirty Rangers against three hundred Indians at Bird Creek in 1839, was the greatest. Charge after charge the Rangers sent reeling back, and though Captain Bird and four Rangers died, fifty Indians were killed, including the chief!

During the Mexican War the force reached its maximum in numbers. The Texans had many an old score to pay off and they flocked into the three regiments raised by Jack Hays for duty against the guerillas menacing the American column. Captain Walker's company was attached to General Taylor's command at Brownsville. Wherever they served, the Rangers were the terror of the Mexicans.

In Texas, as on other frontiers, it was the settlers who brought civilization. But before the sod could be broken, the Ranger must make the country safe. Small wonder that the name "Ranger" means so much to any Texan. Hero of a thousand grim battles; rough-and-ready, efficient always, he rendered a great service. Even to-day, rarely does a year pass that one, at least, does not die "with boots on."

It has been said that the Rangers' uniform consists of "a cartridge belt and the largest Stetson obtainable." But this is not strictly true; even in sunny Texas shirts and trousers and boots are worn. It has also been remarked that the motto of the force might be that standing report: "Killed while resisting arrest, while trying to cross into Mexico."—E. C.

THE THIRTEENTH NOTCH

By WALTER PRESCOTT WEBB

Author of "The Texas Rangers"

Twelve notches had that grim tally stick, each for a man who had contributed to the ruination of old Pablo; and there was room for one more. For it Pablo placed his trust in God—and the Texas Rangers

NEAR as I can tell," said Tom Barbee of the Bar B ranch, "the life of you Texas Rangers on this border is nothing but one of easy danger."

And that rancher was about right. Our company went down on the Rio Grande on a matter of diplomacy. It was a wild country then, just like now; and dangerous, too, with that leg of the river full of gun-runners, refugees and cow-thieves in two languages. Texas cattle went to Mexico in herds; and quite a few Mexican mavericks, twos and threes mostly, and good travelers, would stray over to this side and get mixed up in Texas trail herds that were movin' out for Dodge City, Ogalalla and Cheyenne. But the balance of trade was against us, and so the Texas Rangers set up a camp at Escondido in order to restore equilibrium in international affairs.

Easy danger was right. Of course we had to fight—that's a Texas Ranger's business, but outside of that we took things as they came. We didn't drill like the soldiers over at Fort Brown. We went when we pleased and where, unless under orders from the captain, and we hated discipline and regularity like a *pelado* hates soap.

Craig McClary was the one exception; and the captain said if he hadn't seen Craig put to the test so many times, he'd rank him at about a deuce-spot for a Ranger, because he was so orderly. But Craig was the ace instead of deuce. He'd been mixed up with more Texas gun-fighters and Mexican knife-throwers in this chaparral than any of us. He was easily the crack shot of our company, fearless as a lion; bold, yet with a bump of caution that a Texas Ranger must have, and an iron nerve. It was said on the border—and I can believe it—that Craig McClary never made a first pass—nor a false one. The Mexicans called him *La Muerte Repentina*, which means Sudden Death.

Tom Barbee knew all the rangers on the border and often dropped in on us around meal time just like we did on him at his ranch-house. We'd helped him out of many tight places and saved him some cows now and then, and he was always lookin' for a chance to do us a good turn. While he was eating our chuck and trying to wash it down with what the cook thought was coffee, he saw his opportunity.

"Want a cook, don't you, Captain?" he opens in his offhand way.

"Well, I might," comes back the captain, as though he'd just thought about it.

Not that the captain felt the need of a cook. He was a tough old Texan, used to camp life; and he could live on what a

hungry coyote would leave anyhow.

"Got an extra one you want to get rid of?" asked the captain.

"Ain't exactly got an extra one," said Barbee, ruffled some. "But Pablo's a good hombre," he argued. "He ain't a Mexican, either, exceptin' in blood and color, language and religion. Used to be a big man on the Texas side here, but got mixed in one of these border wars and lost everything. Never heard the whole of it, but it seems that old Escondido cleaned him out. Pablo once owned the Escondido rancho over yonder, but nothing's left now but his memory and religion. Right pious, he is, and gives thanks every morning for his blessings, whatever they are. He seems to think Providence sits in on the game of life in Rio Grande Valley. I've seen a lot of people like that, but where my cows are concerned, I'd risk 'em with the Texas Rangers. He's a blame good cook, though."

Pablo was a good cook. Long service with the Bar B outfit—he wouldn't work for Mexicans—had given him skill in preparing that mixed menu that men on the Mexican border like. He cooked in two languages, sourdough bread or *sopa de arroz*, hotcakes and *tortillas*, fried steak and *frijoles*, they were all the same to Pablo.

We liked him in other ways, too. He could keep a long silence and knew how to tend his own business, which is a mighty good recommendation around a Ranger camp. Evenings he would sit for two hours and never speak, thinking about that lost fortune, I reckon. Or maybe he'd drag out a battered guitar that Maximilian must have brought from Paris when he came to be emperor, and pick out the trembling notes of "La Paloma" or "Ave Maria," and then as a sort of tribute to us, he'd do a turn at "Dixie" and "Turkey in the Straw." We liked that, too.

We were soon convinced that Pablo was one good Mexican. We never saw such humility and resignation. When an American, especially a Texan, gets stripped clean, like Pablo had been, he turns bitter, raises hell and tries to get even with his enemy. But old Pablo was different and didn't bear a grudge at all, so far as we could tell. Of course he didn't talk; nobody does on the border. It was hard to get anything out of him, and I never got more than enough to fill the gaps in the story I'd picked up from the lore of the country. It was the story of a vendetta carried on in Mexican fashion to the very end. It ran like this.

PABLO and Escondido were neighboring *rancheros*, living, as I said, in a land without law. The trouble started over a weazley dogie that by rights probably belonged to neither one of them, and the action was fast. Pablo had a run of hard luck; his cattle, the good travelers, went up the Chisholm Trail to Kansas under Escondido's road brand; his *remuda* saddle horses swam into Mexico and furnished mounts for the raiding bandits, and his *manada* of mares began to populate the ranches of Chihuahua with horse stock.

Then by the flight of buzzards Pablo found his boy—the older one—shot in the back and left to rot in the chaparral. The old man himself carried scars of wounds that would have killed any but a border Mexican. Without horses and cows no ranch in Texas pays, and Pablo's went for debt. It was bought on the block by Escondido's agent, and in the end Pablo had nothing. His wife had died and his only son had gone into Mexico to an uncle or some relative like that.

Of course Escondido made medicine of Pablo's misfortune. He was a shrewd hombre, a good herder of loose-way border men. In the old days he corralled a gang of them, *ladrones*, *bandidos* and *salteadores*, all of the *vaquero* class, and held them to him by ties of common and remunerative crime. Two pesos for a maverick and fifty for a man, and Escondido paid promptly. He an outlaw? Escondido! No siree, not by a lariat's length. He kept himself within the law. Nothing could be fastened on him.

"Pablo," said I, one day when I had made out the story this far, "where are these men you talk of? The Rangers hear nothing of them now."

"Escondido, he leeve now on Pablo *rancho*," he answered innocent-like.

"Escondido, yes, but the others?"

Pablo hesitated, and then with the manner of one about to reveal a secret, he turned to a corner and drew from his bunk a piece of carved wood, polished to a dull and aged brown. Of course the thing meant nothing to me, but I noted curiously that the old man fingered it with reverent though nervous hands, and when he looked at me, his eyes were like those of an eagle.

Before he spoke he bowed his head, mumbled and made strange signs.

"The *bandidos*—" and he spoke as if they were secondary now—"señor, they go in God's way." Placing a brown digit on the first notch of the stick, Pablo continued, "Pedro Sanchez crossa the Rio Grande with many cows—stolen, señor. They mill in the stream, and Sanchez go down—lika thees—no come up."

"And the others?" I urged him out of a reverie.

"Juan Garza maka big drunk in Juarez saloon. Six-shooters bang! bang! bang!" And Pablo tapped his heart to show me God's way with Juan Garza.

By this time the stick was taking on real meaning, and I saw Pablo's brown finger on the third notch.

"Miguel Romero keeled by *rurales* when he come to Texas queeck with cows for trail herd."

And so Pablo told off, one after another, how man after man met booted death as men do, and will, on this border.

"Have you had no hand in all this, Pablo? Have you done nothing?" I inquired.

The old man seemed startled, as though he had never thought of that.

"Nothing, señor, nothing—it was God."

Then I saw the way Pablo had the cards laid out; his philosophy, religion; I reckon you'd say. Old Man Providence had stepped in on his side to even up the score, and Pablo was keeping tally. Then I counted the notches, each standing for a dead man, on the polished wood, and I made out twelve—with room for one more. Pablo interpreted my questioning look.

"Escondido," he murmured with no show of feeling.

Now this Escondido was still a problem, what the captain called a regular ee-nigma, I reckon. Something of an old grandee. Like a lot of the rest of 'em, Texan as well as Mexican, he saw the time had come to quit stealing cattle. Of course, what with a little smuggling and gun-running as side lines, he'd already stolen himself into a fortune, respectability and a prospective seat in the Texas legislature. He was still inside the law, and particularly conscientious around the Texas Rangers. Captain Nally had suspicions that he directed the operations of gun-smugglers to Mexican revolutionists, but suspicion was as far as he got. This bend of the Rio Grande was just a horseshoe for luck around old Escondido's neck of the country.

It wasn't only in lands and grass-eating stock that Escondido was lucky. He had a fine family, as things went on the border. And Mariana, you should have seen her. All the dons up the river a hundred miles and down hurled themselves against the stockade that old Escondido had set up about her. Not a real stockade, you know; but pride and claims to Castillian blood, backed by wealth, served as drawbridge, wall and moat around this river castle. It was only where Mariana was concerned that Escondido was not his wary and cautious self. She was his weakness, and it was generally understood that for her alone he would risk danger, or murder. A fox in everything else, he was a regular bear over that black-eyed señorita.

Just how fierce the old hidalgo could be was demonstrated when word came that Mariana, who was in Mexico City for a season, had fallen in love with a young toreador who was winning a great name for himself in the arena and casting all the honors he won at Señorita Mariana's feet. Old Escondido raged and swore up and down the Rio Grande, threatened to go to Mexico City and play toreador himself on this young Mexican. He called Mariana home, of course; but once she came—far from Mexico City and the arena—she dominated her father, too.

IT WAS funny the way Pablo felt about the Texas Rangers. Of course, we'd been mighty lucky in our negotiations with the tough characters of the border, usually letting them out second best; but Pablo had us rated higher than we really deserved. And as for Craig McClary, old Pablo simply worshipped him, and looked after him in that flattering way that a Mexican knows so well. If Sudden Death was ace to the Rangers, he was nothing short of a royal flush to Pablo. It never occurred to that Mexican that any harm could come to McClary, and he would have sent Sudden Death into a band of a hundred armed bandits perfectly confident that the ranger would come out not only victorious but unharmed. To tell the truth, all of us felt about the same way about McClary.

Sudden Death liked Pablo, too, after a fashion, just as he liked things that were weak or helpless. Why, McClary brought in all sorts of derelicts he found on the range and made Pablo nurse them back to

life. Once it was a wounded faun, again a young crow, and then a starving wild pig. Finally the captain told him that the State of Texas was too hard up to board so many animals, and that the legislature hadn't made any appropriation for them, besides.

But Craig was a queer Scotchman, and went his own way. He had regular habits, as I said, and every day when there was nothing to do he'd make a patrol up the river and back; always went the same way and at the same time. The boys declared they had set their watches by him.

Another weakness of his was clothes. Sudden Death loved his shop-made boots, twenty-dollar Stetson and pearl-handled, cylinder-engraved side-arms. I've seen him tog out in Mexican costume, high-crowned straw sombrero, fancy breeches and red sash, which with his deep tan made him look more like a Mexican than a Texan. Maybe this love for gaudy colors was the one common bond between Sudden Death and old Pablo. In other ways it was a partnership of strength and weakness, a sort of lion and lamb. And when this Texas lion and Mexican lamb lay down together, and Old Man Providence stumped his toe over them while patroling the Rio Grande Valley, he must have been considerably startled over what happened.

ONE day when the whole still valley was sinking under the dusk of evening, a stranger pulled up at the door of the Ranger cabin. He turned out to be Pablo's boy, who had come in from Mexico to see his father. The old man was proud of this boy, and well he might be, for Antonio Pablo was the finest looking Mexican I ever saw. He was olive dark, with firm skin and a body good to look at. His movements were lithe and sure, like a Mexican bobcat's, and he had a pair of soft, rambling, black eyes that moved slow but missed nothing. Pablo hadn't told us about this boy and we had no way of knowing that he was the famous toreador and lover of Mariana Escondido. But we might have guessed something from his clothes: braided high sombrero with a band of Cordovan leather inlaid with engraved silver ornaments, a serape of Mexican red and green, and a short jacket all trimmed like the hat.

Captain Nally was a bit leery of Antonio, but Sudden Death fell for him hard and the captain had respect for Sudden Death's opinions and wishes. Those clothes took Craig's eyes, and no mistake. They fitted him like a glove, too; and Antonio, who seemed to have a lot of 'em, insisted, with true Mexican generosity, on giving him a complete outfit. It was right amusing to see this big Texas Ranger dress up in the Mexican gear and admire himself. We didn't say a thing to him, but we were really enjoying Antonio.

And you should have seen Pablo. He actually thought more of Antonio than he did of McClary. He would look at Antonio just like a lover looks at his sweetheart, and it was mighty easy for us to see that the boy was all tangled up in the old man's heart, along with memories of better days. But Pablo seemed to have some bitter-weed mixed with his joy over having his son, and when we learned later that Antonio had come to see Mariana, daughter of Escondido, we understood that, too. Where Escondido was concerned, old Pablo had neither nerve nor hope for his own kind.

Love is just as impatient on the Rio Grande as elsewhere, and Antonio was not long in making his plans to see Mariana. Pablo helped him, not because he wanted to, but because he could refuse the boy nothing. The note which Pablo knew how to get delivered was, for a Mexican, a brief one.

Dearest Mariana:

I am near. Meet me tomorrow morning under the big oak by the river at 11 o'clock.

Antonio.

This oak, a well-known landmark, stood some two miles below our camp at the base of a high ridge that butted right up to the river. Whether old Pablo suggested the time and place of meeting I do not know, but I guess he did, as he was familiar with the whole country. Poor old hombre; he must have felt that it was to be a rendezvous of death and not of love. This boy was all he had, and now he would go, like horses, cattle and lands, into the hands of Escondido. It did look as if Pablo and Providence would be hard put for another tally.

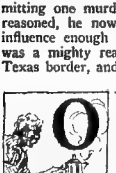
Pablo was in no hurry with the note. He must have his coffee, and over the boiling pot he steamed the seal of the envelope and furtively read the letter many times. I doubt if he had had such a spell

of thinking for years. Finally, the thinking was over, and Pablo with the captain's pencil and a trembling hand converted the second "1" of the eleven into an "o." Then, as old people do, he held the paper at arms's length and read the new version.

under the big oak by the river at 10 o'clock.

With a little flour paste he sealed the letter again and dried it carefully; then he gave it to the messenger with instructions to deliver it—not to Mariana, but to Escondido himself.

I'll never forget the events of the next morning, and I can imagine what happened over on the Escondido ranch by what came later. All his life old Escondido had entrusted the bad jobs to his men, but here, at last, was one he must do himself. He could risk no one in what concerned his precious Mariana; he must protect her from the toreador, even at the cost of committing one murder. Besides, Escondido reasoned, he now had respectability and influence enough to kill one man. That was a mighty reasonable number on the Texas border, and was allowed.



OVER at the Ranger camp old Pablo was up and about early, more solicitous than usual for the welfare and comfort of Sudden Death. I am not sure but it was Pablo himself who laid out the fancy clothes for McClary to wear. Anyhow, Craig came out all decked in 'em and started for his regular patrol down the river. As I said, he loved routine; the only Ranger that did. Well, he set off right on time, and old Pablo seemed mighty pleased to have him going all rigged out like a regular bullfighter. Our captain said every man had a weakness. Clothes was Craig's, I reckon, just like Mariana was old Escondido's and Antonio was Pablo's.

By ten o'clock McClary had made his ride down the river and was well-nigh home. The bridle trail followed in general the second bank of the river, though here and there some distance back. But this rocky ridge I spoke of was covered with cat-claw and cactus, and broken by deep arroyos so that the trail elbowed its way around the ridge and under the big oak that stood at the base of it, near the Rio Grande. It was a point that furnished good hiding and a long view in both directions, and it was here that Escondido, with murder in his shriveled heart, waited the coming of old Pablo's only son.

As McClary approached this oak he had no suspicion of trouble, but his horse stuck up both ears, sniffed and gave him warning. The Texas Ranger rode on with caution, knowing how danger lies around sharp curves on the Rio Grande. When he was within fifty feet a man stepped swiftly from behind the jutting rock with his gun coming up. That was just good six-shooter range and Sudden Death was in action, that reflex action that is quicker than thinking.

I remember it well. We were sitting in the cabin that morning, Antonio, Pablo and me. The wind was coming up the valley, carrying sound like a wire. Antonio had already saddled his horse, making ready in good time to set off for his rendezvous with Mariana. As he stopped at the door, there came from down the river the clear and sharp report of a single gun, the unmistakable crack of a .45.

There came into Pablo's wise old eyes something of the look of an eagle with prey. Mumbling and with many queer motions he made his way to the corner and to his bunk, and I saw him cutting the thirteenth notch on the tally stick.

"O'NERY"

NOT so many years ago I met, at one of the national pistol tournaments, a former captain of Rangers. For the purpose of this yarn he shall be nameless. The old-timers will at once, however, recognize him. He is still one of the best pistol shots in the world. I have seen him flip up a dime, draw and hit it with a .45 bullet before it touched the ground. He was respected by outlaws as a "killer."

I questioned him as to what had become of two of his old rangers whom I had known in my youth.

"Well," he replied, "Bud done right well. Got himself a wife, a couple of perty kids and a nice ranch. It was too bad about Hank, though. Hank got to drinkin' and the more he drunk the o'nerier he got. Let it go for a spell, but he kept gettin' worse an' worse. Finally," he finished almost apathetically, "finally he got so dog-gone o'nery I had to shoot him!"—R. E. D.

RED KNIVES

By ERNEST HAYCOX

All of the Ohio frontier country was a vast battleground; far and wide the hostile Indians pillaged and settlers kept fearfully to their cabins—but George Rogers Clark and his rangers resolved to remove the menace once and for all. A story of the Northwest in the Revolution

CHAPTER I

"TO DETROIT, CHEVES"

GEORGE ROGERS CLARK was making his last camp on the Ohio, and the four weary companies of buckskin militia stretched their legs at the end of a hard day. The flame of the squad fires illumined the dark water of the river and outlined the thicket of the unknown back country, while the men, just finished with the evening meal, drowsed before the grateful heat, sitting cross-legged. A monotone of talk broke the rustle of the wind and the lap of the water. A sentry emerged from the woods for a moment to survey the clearing and plunged out of sight.

"Jed Bonnett, dum ye, whar's thet twist o' baccy I guv ye yeste'day?" a throaty voice called from one fire to the other. "I'm done fer a chaw, danged if I ain't, now." A milder voice answered, and the peaceful drone went on. Near the foot of the encampment some Tennessean chanted softly the Seminole corn ritual.

By the fires came a tall, lean man who stopped momentarily at each blaze to scan its circle of men. The light revealed a tanned, aristocratic face marked above all else with lines of arrogance and sullen humor which seemed to intensify with each fire the man inspected. At last, near the end of the line, he found the object of his search and broke into an impatient exclamation.

"Cheves!"

"Yes?" A figure rose to sitting posture.

"Why don't you stay by your own fire? Been trailin' you like a puppy dog. Clark wants to see you right off."

A chuckle swept the circle, and a massive-shouldered, bearded fellow gravely rebuked the messenger.

" 'Pears like you ain't been doin' nawthin' but grouse this hull trip. Kind of spilin' fer fight. Ef I was Cheves danged if I moughtn't risk a fall with ye, Danny Parmenter."

Cheves rose and came from the fire.

"Thanks," he said, walking toward the head of the camp.

Parmenter shifted his feet, cast a swift glance of anger at the bearded fellow and hurried after his man. Striding up the roughly formed street, they appeared typical sons of the Old Dominion who in that year of 1778, during the Revolutionary War had cast their lot in the newer country west of the Blue Ridge. Both showed

lean and wiry frames beneath the buckskin, and both possessed the sensitive features and proud carriage of native Virginians. Cheves was the more solidly built. He swung along with the gliding step of an experienced woodsman, while his bronzed face, moulded by hard adventure, lacked any line of petty spite.

In the darkness between fires Parmenter began to grumble again.

"General sends for you pretty often! Seems like you stand mighty close to him. Policy for you to make up, eh? Sending me out to fetch you like an Indian trailer! Damme, but that's fine! There's some things I can't stand in a man, Cheves, an' toadyin' is one of them! Lickspittle!"

"Wouldn't get so steamed up. Ain't to help you," Cheves drawled in response to this irritable attack.

"Don't you use that patronizin' way on me!" Parmenter turned, furious. "All I been doin' lately, seems like, is flunkyin' between you and Clark. I didn't join for that, and I won't stand it any longer." He stopped and pulled at Cheves' jacket. "Put up your fists and we'll have it out."

But Cheves broke away in a gust of impatience.

"Don't be a fool! You've been an idiot ever since we left Wheeling. If Clark had sent me to look for you I'd have done it and kept my mouth shut. Take what comes to you."

They strode on, but soon Cheves spoke again.

"I don't know what you came on this expedition for—but I'm mighty tired of being ragged. I don't want any more of it. We can't get along, so just keep away from me. I'd have killed you long ago if it wasn't for a reason."

"You needn't use her for an excuse," Parmenter sneered. "I don't hide behind her skirt. I'm not afraid of you!" An incredible harshness, a vitriolic bitterness tainted his next words. "You don't win all the good things in this world. You didn't get her! She's seen through you. Hear that? She's mine—promised to me!"

"All right." Weariness filled Cheves' voice. "All right. Lower your voice, man. If she's promised you, then be satisfied. Now shut up."

The other subsided, yet for a man who had conquered a rival he seemed to lack any trace of generosity. His success appeared only to have sharpened his hatred, and he would have continued the quarrel had they not arrived at the largest fire. Around it were four men; Clark, and three captains of the party, Helms, Harrod and Bowman. Clark was broiling a chunk of deer meat over the coals while the other officers shared a faded and creased map in which they found great interest.

"Here he is," grunted Parmenter.

"You want me, sir?" asked Cheves. The discipline between men and officers in this brigade was of the rudest sort. No officer commanded, save by the downright merit within him; and no man followed unless urged by confidence and respect. The tall Virginian stood at attention only because he held a full measure of loyalty to the stern figure in front; it was a good soldier honoring a good soldier.

"All right, Parmenter. Won't need you any more." Clark nodded.

Parmenter's mouth cursed. He scowled at Cheves and flung himself away. Clark shrugged a burly shoulder.

"That lad's spoiling fast," he commented. "Here, Helms, you finish this meat for me. Sit down, Cheves."

Captain Bowman glanced toward the rear. Directly back of them the water maples and osier bunched to form a thick bit of wood, with the underbrush winding around the tree trunks. Clark caught his captain's eye and nodded.

"I know," he agreed. "Trees have ears; but this is as safe a place as we'll ever find. Hand me the map, Bowman.

"Now, Cheves, the brigade is leaving the river at this point. Can't go on down the Ohio farther without some British ranger or French voyageur seein' us. Soon as they did, immediately Kaskaskia would be warned—which would ruin my surprise party. I've decided to cut straight across country from here. It's five days' march. Hope to take the enemy completely off guard.

"But capturin' Kaskaskia's only a part of the campaign. I'm plannin' other things—and I've *got* to know what Hamilton is doing in Detroit. Last I heard he was to bring some companies of regulars down to Vincennes as a part of the reinforcements to this country. They may be on the way now. I've got to know. And I've got to know what he plans to do this fall and winter. He's been distributing red-handled scalping knives right and left. But how many tribes has he got under his thumb? How many war parties will go out this fall? How many men are in the Detroit garrison? And are the French habitants contented or rebellious? A lot depends on that last, Cheves. And, most important, how many rangers are in the whole

lake region? They stir up more danger than anybody else. You see what the job is, Cheves?" He leaned forward and tapped the Virginian's knee. "I want you to go to Detroit and find out these things."

"Yes, sir," said Cheves.

"Good!" Clark leaned back. "Now look at this map. Take a good impression of it in your mind. It's all we know of the trail between here and Detroit. This was Croghan's route in 1765 when the Kickapoos and Mascoutines carried him off to Fort Ouiatanon. It's seventy-five miles from here north to Vincennes. Two hundred more to Ouiatanon. Two hundred and fifty to the bend of the Wabash; that's by the Twigtwee villages. After that I don't know. You'll be forced to stay off the Wabash most of the time, and you'll have to circle Vincennes and Ouiatanon. After that you'll be in Ottowa and Twigtwee country along the Maumee. Beyond these are the Pottawotomies and the Wyandotes, and they're the worst Indians on the border."

At this remark Harrod, veteran of a thousand Kentucky fights, raised his voice. "There ain't a friendly or neutral Injun the hull way," he declared. "Travel light an' fast. Don't light many fires or shoot much game."

"When you get to Detroit, play the part of an independent trader and use your head," Clark advised. "That's why I picked you. Find out what I've got to know, and come right back. Pull out tonight. Tell the boys you're off on a small scouting party."

THE wind threw a sudden puff of air into the clearing; the fire blazed higher and veered sidewise. At the same moment the distinct snapping of a twig came from behind them. Bowman whirled as though bitten by a snake and the lines of his face turned suddenly savage.

"I knew it!" he ripped out.

"Maybe it's the wind," suggested Helms.

"Wind doesn't crack twigs with that sound," said Clark, shaking his head. "Stay fast, Bowman. Don't shoot. Won't do to scare up excitement now. But there's spies in this outfit! I've known it since we left Wheeling. I think that slew-nosed Sartaine is one of them."

"Wish I could ketch him at it," muttered Bowman.

"Get your outfit," continued Clark to Cheves. "Travel fast. When you return I'll be at Kaskaskia, or I won't be alive." The slate gray eyes caught fire and the stubborn, long-jawed face lightened to the flare of his ambition. "Good luck!"

Cheves strode down the line of fires. Half-way, Parmenter intercepted him.

"What's up?" he growled.

"Nothin'," said Cheves, speaking loud enough for the adjoining group to hear. "Just goin' on a little scoutin' trip."

Parmenter's eyes sought the other man's face and slowly the blood crept into them and his mouth curled back after the fashion of a vicious horse.

"Damn you!" he breathed, "I'll not stand that!" and before Cheves could jerk away a flat palm had struck him on the cheek with a report loud enough for all men at the nearby fire to hear.

It dazed Cheves for a bit. After that he moved forward.

"I've stood plenty," he said. "You've picked a fight."

He moved into action quietly. A straight-armed jab threw Parmenter's head back, and before he could parry another blow caught him on the temple. But Cheves left an opening and Parmenter's fist found it, leaving a crimson streak.

Both fought in silence, with their whole hearts. There was no avoiding punishment. Each tried to batter the other into submission. Parmenter's grimaced face mirrored quite plainly his purpose to injure or maim without scruple. Cheves caught him on the mouth, and he grinned through the hurt of it—grinned and seemed to slip, twisting his body, raising a knee and driving it full into his opponent's stomach. Cheves saw it barely in time, jumped sidewise like a cat and took the blow on his hip. That trick thoroughly warmed him. A wild anger sent him forward, taking punishment unheeded and battering down Parmenter's guard weakly to his hips. With a kind of sob the latter met the final blow on the chin and slid to earth like a dummy relieved of props.

Cheves stood over him, angrier and angrier.

"When will you learn to fight fair? Next time we fight, bucko, I'll kill you! I'm tired of using my fists, too. Remember that."

Parmenter raised his head, wiping away the blood, unmeasurable rage in his eyes.

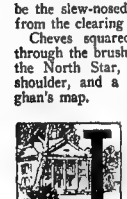
"All right," he answered, almost in a monotone. "I'll take that challenge.

Anything goes, my friend."

Cheves turned on his heel and went the length of the clearing to get his equipment. Around the waist of his hunting shirt went the leathern belt holding shot pouch, powder horn, game bag and provision pouch, and hunting knife. Last of all he picked up the long-barreled gun and his broad-brimmed hat.

"I'm off for a little cruise," he said. "Dan, you take care of the blanket. I can't pack it." He turned away from the fire and strode along the edge of the brush to the opening of a deer run. At this point he stopped to survey the clearing. Clark was busy with his vensison, and the captains studied at the ancient map; but farther down the clearing a more sinister sight caught his eye. Parmenter had gone to his fire. A short compact figure slid out of the dark and gestured to him. The two met on the edge of the light, and as the second man turned the Virginian saw it to be the slew-nosed Sartaine. Both turned from the clearing and disappeared.

Cheves squared himself and plunged through the brush. His only guides were the North Star, hanging over his right shoulder, and a mental picture of Croghan's map.



IT WAS Dan Fellows, wrapping Cheves' blanket around him for extra comfort, who explained the sudden quarrel to his companions. "Me now, I've watched them two families—Cheves and Parmenter—since a boy. They've allus fought. Once in a while a black un breaks out in the Parmenter strain. This Danny's like that."

"You-all know 'em?" The circle paid him attention.

"Ye-ep." The speaker crushed some leaf tobacco in his pipe and lit it with a flaring brand. "Cheves' blood is good. My folks run with them many a generation. These two young bucks always scrapped. Fought and kicked since they was knee-high to a grasshopper. And always it was a case of Parmenter tryin' to git onfair advantage. There's a wild cast in his eyes.

"Lately they've fought on account of a mighty sweet girl, for the two bucks have run nip an' tuck with her judgin'. But it seems like she don't know her own mind when it comes to men, which ain't strange. Anyhow, it goes along like that until one night there's a great fight atween 'em and at dawn next day there was a duel. I snuck up and saw that duel from beyont some willows. Me and another Virginia man, both with guns to see there warn't any foul play agin' Dick Cheves. Way to fight is ball an' ball, God helpin' the best man.

"Well, He did. There was two shots all bunched of a sudden an' Parmenter's gun dropped from his arm an' he fell. Next thing was onexpected. Cheves had turned an' was walkin' to his horse. Afore anybody could say Sam Bass, Parmenter had licked another lettle gun from his coat an' taken a fresh shot. Didn't hit Cheves, by Jo! Dick didn't even turn until he got a-horse. Then he speaks up in a right smart voice like this. 'Danny,' he says, 'if it warn't for one thing I'd sure kill you.' And then he rides on."

The circle hung on every word. Only one man of the crowd saw Parmenter and the guide slip back to their fire, gather their guns and belts and hurry again to the shadows. Only Fellowes saw it, from the corner of his eye. Unhurried he finished the tale.

" 'Twas the next day an' I was standing with Dick when he gits a note from the Ralston plantation—that was the girl's name—brought by a nigger. Dick's face jist went ter black when he read it. All he said was, 'Dan, I'm goin' away.' Well, I just ketched me a horse an' here we are. 'Twas later in the trip as you boys know that Parmenter joined. Knowin' what I do, I guess none of you saw what I did. But there's one less man comin' back from this party, darn me now if he ain't."

A gust of rage roughened his voice. He drew on his belt and kicked away the blankets.

"Jed Bonnett, you keep these things," Fellows commanded—and strode, rifle a-cradle, into the shadows, following Sartaine and Parmenter over the same trail Cheves had taken a short half hour before.

CHAPTER II

AMBUSH

AFTERNOON, three days later, stubbled and sweat-smeared of face, Cheves was on the far end of his great circle around Vincennes; with the broad river sparkling at him through the meshwork of the trees. The day had begun full and warm, but as the sun started down westward the heat, sul-

lenly stifling since the Virginian had started his solitary trip, gathered into clouds; flat and detonating claps of thunder broke in the sky and by four or five o'clock all light was gone. A patter of rain fell on the leaves and Cheves raised a fold of his hunting shirt to cover the powder horn.

Passing Vincennes was a nerve tightening affair, for here were gathered the Piankeshaw Indians, and here centered the power of the British on the lower reaches of the Wabash. By rough calculation he had detoured the town at a distance of ten miles, but even at that interval the traces of scouting parties were plainly visible. He had passed five trails leading to the old settlement, and each bore the marks of recent travel.

Once, at noon of the day before, he had gone off trail to a thicket and was munching jerked venison when a silent file of ten Indians hurried by. Their bodies, bare to the waist, were daubed with yellow and red pigments and from each hip was slung the belt with its burden of powder-horn, shot pouch, knife and tomahawk. Three warriors carried each a scalp dangling from the tomahawk. Cheves gritted his teeth. Those scalps meant slaughtered American backwoodsmen.

That night he had forded a creek, swam a river and camped deep in a tangle of grape vines.

The patter on the leaves broke to a swift torrent, and in the darkness Cheves had difficulty in finding his way. Once a crash of brush sent him off the path, but it was only the falling of a tree. Again, the waving, sighing saplings so resembled advancing people in the darkness and drizzle that he abandoned the path for a hundred yards or more.

He took note of every forest sign, for he had learned two days ago that someone hung to his trail. In the dark of one night there had been the swish of brush, and only yesterday he had seen tracks of an Indian party doubling back around him. It looked as if a general alarm of his presence had reached Vincennes through some spy in Clark's outfit.

The rain increased its fury, the bushes bent and twisted across the trail so that in the semi-darkness he could scarce push his way on. The path had become a small waterway and he was wet to the skin. But the physical discomfort didn't matter. Such a storm erased the marks of his trail and allowed him relaxed vigilance.

A curve shut off his view and some sleeping monitor, plus the cloak of the storm, let him forge ahead without reconnaissance. When he again faced the straight path it was to find a bowed figure in buckskin rapidly advancing. The latter saw Cheves immediately and threw up an arm. The Virginian swore, but it was too late to take cover. Coming to a halt, he dropped the butt of his gun and waited.

"How," the newcomer grunted. A pair of black, inquisitive eyes took in every detail of Cheves' outfit.

"How," returned Cheves. He placed the man instantly as one of the many British rangers abroad in the forest who went from tribe to tribe and from fort to fort. No other man would march through the woods so carelessly.

"Hell of a day for travelin'," offered the ranger. "Where from?"

"Vincennes," Cheves answered after a rapid estimate.

"So? Was there two days ago an' didn't see you."

"Just come in from Kaskaskia. In a hurry to reach Ouiatanon."

The ranger took a sudden interest, shaking the water from his dripping face. "What's up?"

"Spanish at St. Louis tryin' to stir the Kickapoos against us. There's somethin' in the wind and it ain't for our health."

The ranger cursed the Spanish volubly. "Never did trust any of 'em further'n I c'd throw a bull by the tail. I'm all for wipin' 'em off the Mississippi. Never any peace in the Illinois country till we do."

"Where you from this time?" inquired Cheves.

"Ouiatanon. Hell's a-poppin'. Couple hundred Saukee renegs broke away from their people an' won't have nothin' to do with the other Nations. Killed some Twigtwee bucks and are headin' this way now. Wouldn't be surprised if they was right on my heels." The thought made him cast a sharp glance about. "I'm on my way to get the Piankeshaws to cut 'em off. Can't have 'em buckin' British authority. Bad example. You'd better keep an eye skinned. No tellin' what they'd do to a ranger."

"How's the other Nation?"

"Fine as prime fur. Scalpin' party goes out every week from Detroit. Make it all hair, I say. Sooner we kill the Americans off the better it'll be. If you're for Ouiatanon, hang to the Wabash an' the bottoms. Bone-dry elsewhere. But you'd better watch for them Sauks."

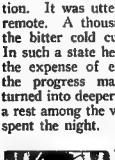
Cheves picked up his gun. "Well, I've got to move. So long."

"So long. Tell Abbott I got through."

The bend separated them and once more Cheves ploughed through the rain. He swore bitterly. It was an unfortunate meeting, in the most dangerous of places. The ranger would soon enough find he had been duped, and Vincennes was but twelve miles back. Cheves was going to be vigorously pursued.

From any viewpoint his position was precarious. The storm would cover his traces for a while, but when the rain stopped he would leave a trail that any savage in North America could follow. There was only one expedient left, and he adopted it as soon as the idea occurred. Grasping the rifle tighter, he broke into a dog trot. The water splashed over his head, but it made him only a little more miserably cold.

On and on he ran, slipping and sliding, picking a way where the brush had fallen across the path, gaining speed where drier ground permitted it. The gray light faded before a tempestuous night; the way grew less and less discernible and finally was altogether blotted out. The dog trot slowed to a snail's pace. The trail was worse than anything Cheves had ever experienced. The wind howled savagely and the rain poured down until the trace became a torrent and he no longer could pick his direction. It was utterly black. Time seemed remote. A thousand demons howled and the bitter cold cut through to the bone. In such a state he fought his way on until the expense of energy was greater than the progress made. At that point he turned into deeper brush and hollowing out a rest among the vines, crouched down and spent the night.



T BREAK of day he was up and on again. He had gained during the night, he knew, but would lose by day, for the Piankeshaws could trace him by a hundred short cuts, with the common adeptness of all woodland tribes. Toward noon the wind fell off and the rain abated. By mid-afternoon the sun forced its way through the dreary clouds and shortly the earth was a vast rising mass of steam. To Cheves it was a great comfort, drying and warming his soaked body, but with that comfort came a new necessity. He must leave the trail and seek the forest where his footprints would not be so plainly revealed.

He was on the point of turning off when, from directly ahead of him, there came rolling through the forest the report of a gun, followed by a series of short, bouncing crashes. Cheves drew up, nerves on edge. It sounded like a hunter—possibly from Vincennes. But no, a hunter from the Fort would have small necessity of traveling so far afield for game. Perhaps, then, it was some independent British trapper.

The Virginian was about to step into the brush when a stir from behind whirled him about. He stopped, half turned. Twenty yards away stood a half-naked, paint-daubed Indian buck. Out of the corner of his eye Cheves saw another advance from the brush in front. He was trapped! For a moment the idea of resistance surged over him. A step and a shot and he would have at least one of them. But the idea passed swiftly. That rifle report meant a larger party nearby. He lowered his gun, and threw up a hand in token of peace.

"The Indians closed in, rifles advanced. The foremost one uttered a monosyllabic grunt and jerked away the Virginian's rifle. He was given a push and turned down the trail. Thus marching, they went through an open glade, turned off the trail to deeper forest and after ten minutes weaving, came to a clearing of some eighty or more yards across. In the center were several small fires, around which were gathered a war party numbering fifty or sixty young braves.

Cheves was shoved into the middle of the encampment toward an Indian who, by physical fitness and bearing, seemed to be the chief. He was fully three inches taller than any other man in the clearing, save Cheves. His chest was broad and deep and his face carried the bitter lines of discontent which only accentuated his authoritative bearing. He heard the speech of his scout, nodded his head and suddenly sprang forward with a savage gesture. "Breetish?" he demanded.

Instantly it came to Cheves that these were not Piankeshaws. This party was a detachment of the renegade Saukee people. So, in commingled relief and consternation he simulated a deep disgust, wrinkling his nose.

"No—no!" He switched to French, which once had been the universal tongue of the forest, *"Je suis Americain."*

The chief was puzzled. "Eh?" he grunted.

Cheves tried another word, one com-

monly used to describe Americans around the Ohio and Mississippi villages.

"Not British. I Bostonnais."

The circle around him moved in recognition of the word, and broke into voluble conversation. Then the chief made another of his swift moves, thrusting forward his hand and ripping back the Virginian's hunting shirt. Beyond the tanned V was white skin. The chief ran his thumb over it, shuffled his fingers through Cheves' black hair, stared at his eyes, tweaked his nose and finally fell to examining the apparel with minutest scrutiny. His fingers tested everything before he muttered something that sounded to the Virginian like acceptance. "Bostonnais," he grunted, and the circle dubiously nodded.

At that moment a scout ran into the glade and threw out a guttural warning. The men about the central fire sprang up; there ensued a rapid parley, with the scout swinging his arms in a wide circle toward Vincennes. Another scout ran in from a different angle and made a quick report. Cheves, watching closely, saw some new turn of event had disturbed the Indians. The tall chief chanted a brief word and the clearing became animated. The scouts slipped back into the brush. Even as the Virginian wondered the main body shuffled into single file, with himself among them, and went quietly down to the overgrown trace. There they followed it, away from Vincennes.

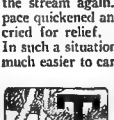
Away from Vincennes was toward Detroit!

Cheves relaxed. Their destination he did not know, but any destination to the north meant the closer approach of his own goal. So, for the time being he could float with the tide, secure from ambush. When the Saukee trail forked away from Detroit, then must he commit himself to a different policy. Not before.

All night they traveled as if sorely pressed by an enemy to the rear. Cheves decided the ranger he had met had succeeded in calling out the Piankeshaws in such large numbers as to repulse the Sauks. Once in the small hours a ripple of warning passed down the file and it halted off trail for a moment. They resumed march in complete silence, each man slipping forward as the figure ahead dropped out of sight. There was nothing to disturb the swift shuffle of moccasined feet save the rythmic breathing of Cheves' immediate neighbors.

At daybreak they camped in another secluded grove and Cheves, dead tired from forty-eight hours of constant travel, fell to a troubled sleep that seemed to last only a moment. Again they were up and on.

There was, Cheves saw, an undercurrent of uneasiness in the column. Scouts went off on the dog trot and came rushing back later with brief reports, to go off again on the run. Thus far the trail had led away from the Wabash, but the new day's march had only been started when the party, apparently because of news brought by a scout, slanted northwesterly, gaining the stream again. At the same time the pace quickened and Cheves' aching muscles cried for relief. But he dared not falter. In such a situation a white man's scalp was much easier to carry than his body.



THEY reached the Wabash at noon, plunged across, rifles held arm high, and climbed the farther bank. Topping the ridge Cheves saw a long undulating plain, smiling under the afternoon sun, luxuriant in vines and hemp grass. The forest was behind; they were entering a new country with a new dress. Ahead was the suggestion of the Illinois River blending with the indefinite mists of the distance, and at that moment Cheves knew they were turning away from the road to Detroit.

Set as he was on this definite goal, the turn of fortune gave him a bitter taste of defeat. It had never been in his nature to accept defeat calmly and now, lightning quick, his thoughts turned to escape. But the Indians were already far beyond the river, crossing the hot flat land, and there was no possible avenue by which he might get clear in daylight. The nearest route to safety was through a thousand yards of open country exposed to fifty rifles. When night came, he might break away and run back for the river, but not before. So he accustomed himself to the swifter pace, and said nothing.

The uneasiness seemed to grow stronger. Cheves could feel it in the braves about him, and when night came and they camped in a small copse an increased number of scouts and sentries were sent out. No fires were lit and a somber silence sat upon every coppered face. Cheves shared the sense of impending trouble. It was nothing definite, but rather an aura caught from these nomadic men who read their destiny in the leaves and smelled it in each puff of the wind. Some disturbing sign had

warned them, and now they were straining every muscle to reach a secure haven.

With this foreboding, Cheves dropped to a fitful slumber in the protection of a thicket, waking from time to time as warriors arrived and departed. On each waking it seemed the tension had increased and that he was the sole sleeper. He did not know at what hour of the night a rough word brought him up. His guide slipped by the trees, coming to a deeper tangle of the brush and here stopped. Cheves dropped a hand to his belt and felt for his hunting knife. All about he saw the darker shadows of the Sauks, seeming in station for a definite attack.

Though he was prepared for this attack, the fierce, sudden gust of rifle fire surprised him. In a general way he thought the storm would break from northeastward, but the attackers were cleverer than that. So quietly as to be without opposition they had encircled the wood and now poured fire from all sides. The leaves pattered and brushed as from a heavy rain. Cheves, unarmed, threw himself flat on the ground. There was no safer place in that doomed wood.

The Virginian knew it to be doomed after the first volley. For, from the sound, fully five hundred rifles were speaking. It seemed only a matter of time before the renegades were annihilated, and Cheves took thought of his own chance of escape. Presently his guide, finding himself too deep in the thicket to be of any aid, left Cheves and crawled toward the firing. It was the last Cheves saw of him, or of any of the Sauks, alive.

The engagement settled to a stubborn rattle and patter of shots, with the occasional war cry catching and going around the attacking ranks. There was no answer. The renegades preserved grim silence, doing damage while they could. For a half hour it continued this way, dying down, flaring up and at last settling to a deceptive calm. It seemed to Cheves as if all the fighters were holding their breath, wating for the last act of a bloody drama.

It came presently, heralded by a full concerted war-whoop from five hundred throats; a lusty baying, a throaty snarl, a feverish yelping, which turned the Virginian's blood to ice. Then the attack closed in, rifles cracking.

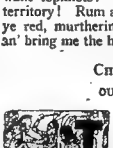
The Virginian could mark each successive advance, could hear, almost, each individual battle, so strategically located was he. As the assault beat back the first line of defense the ring narrowed and its edge came nearer to the covert where he rested. The last defiant cry of the defeated going down before knife or club, the last death-rattle, the grunts and labored breathings of hand to hand conflicts—all mingled to form the welter of massacre.

No sound of mercy given or of pity asked. Grim and stark and relentless. And above all this the Virginian heard of a sudden commands in a broad Celtic brogue.

"At 'em, me pretties! No mercy for the renigs! Bring me back sixty scalps! Hunt 'em down and stemp 'em out! I want topknots! No more renigs in this territory! Rum an' wampum, boys! Oh, ye red, murtherin' divvils, grind 'em out an' bring me the hair!".

CHAPTER III

OUIATANON



IT WAS so unexpected! One moment the entire woods reverberated with sounds of death, with the gurgle and snarl of human throats uttering exclamations of anger and fear; with blows given and blows taken, with the noise of a surging, vindictive advance toward the heart of the brush. So furious was it that the Virginian had given up hope, resolving only to account well for himself in the last mortal struggle.

Then it was all changed. The raucous, commanding voice of the Irishman was the respite of a sure death sentence.

"After 'em, my children! No prisoners! Bring in the hair! Go on through the woods! Get every mither's son!"

He came directly toward the covert, a heavy, aggressive body knocking the brush aside, fighting, swearing furious black oaths and chanting the shibboleth of frontier war, "No prisoners! Bring in the hair!"

Cheves crouched, ready to spring. The last bush parted and the dark figure bulked dimly to view.

"Any of them damn renegs here?" he bellowed.

The Virginian, slightly to the rear of the Irishman, catapulted forward, pinioned his victim by the arms and threw him to earth. They rolled over and over, the surprised man heaving and kicking. His rifle fell aside.

"Shut up," breathed Cheves. "I'm a ranger—got caught by these Saukses.

Easy, easy! Call off your dogs!"

"Holy mither, ye were onexpected!" exploded the Irishman. "Walked right into your arms, I did. I'm a blind fool! If 'twere an Injun my top piece would be airin' now." The thought of his position enraged him. "All right, man; ye needn't hang on so tight. Leggo, or I'll be forced to gouge." Cheves laughed and released his grip. The Irishman got up, still swearing. "A damn oncivilized way o' shtoppin' a man! Who might ye be an' whare did ye get them gorilla arms?"

"Ben Carstairs, Kaskaskia. Who are you?"

"Jim Girty," growled the Irishman.

The fighting had died out. Now and again a rifle shot or war-whoop reached the two, but the skirmish was practically over. Already fires were burning on the plain and the Indians, cooling from the fever of killing, numbered their slain and counted scalps.

"Well," said Girty, "let's get out o' this. Stay by me while I set 'em right. It's a ticklish business when Injuns are in heat. I was too damn careless! If it had been a Saukee, now!"

They passed into the clearing together and Girty threw out a guttural word here and there. Cheves found himself the focus of glittering, blood-shot eyes, but, with his companion, felt reasonably safe. What interested him most was the Irishman's stature. He was a short man with barrel-like shoulders, jet black hair and a beard which seemed to cover every exposed bit of skin. Above it were mournful, suspicious eyes which, like those of the Sauk renegade chief, sought every detail of Cheves' apparel.

"Ye're a long, lean scantlin' of a man," he grumbled, "but I take off me cap to those arms. Now whut's your story?"

Cheves sat by the fire and told the same tale he had invented for the ranger near Vincennes. Its effect was much the same.

Girty slapped a legging and cursed fluently in three tongues. "Those hellish Spaniards! Never saw a good un, an' never expect to. I've told Hamilton many a time he should go south an' wipe 'em out. By an' by there'll be hell a-poppin' an' more dirty work for the likes of you an' me. Arragh! Hamilton's weak-kneed and he don't use his head. What sort o' man is that?"

The Indians gathered about the huge central fire on the plain and were uttering a low rhythmic chant which ebbed and flowed, in celebration of victory. Girty swayed with the chant.

"What sort o' man is that?" he repeated. "It's dog eat dog out here. Many a time my scalp's teetered because some Tennessean cuddled his rifle too close. Raise hell with 'em, I say. When I plug one I say, 'Girty, that adds another day to your life. Darn me if it don't.'"

"Why worry?" asked Cheves. "We've got things sewed tight. Although I do hear there's Shawnees near the Falls wavering'."

Girty turned his head and looked full at Cheves, the black eyes dilating like those of a cat. "Ye talk mighty like a Virginian. I've heard that drawl afore."

"Man, you would, too, if you lived in Southern country."

"How come ye to be a British agent, then?"

"A man's politics, Girty, don't always bear looking into."

Girty nodded. Yet like an animal who has smelled the taint in the wind he could not be immediately quieted. "Whare's your papers if you're from Kaskaskia? Rocheblave'd be sendin' some on to Detroit."

"Saukees got 'em and put 'em in the fire. It's all in my head."

Again Girty nodded.

"Well, ye may be right," he admitted. "I've no cause to pick at a man's politics. Maybe I'm over shy. Niver yet a man I'd trust save me brother Simon. The trail does that."

The dance of victory was over, with a final shout and leap and insult at the Sauk gods.

"'Tis a hard tomorrow and I think I'll sleep," said Girty. "We're goin' on to Weetanon where there'll be a party for Detroit." He fell asleep almost instantly.

Cheves remained awake longer, thinking over his next move. Clark had advised him to assume the rôle of independent trader, but that had not seemed to promise as much information as he could pick while masquerading as a British ranger. If he should meet anybody from Kaskaskia in Detroit he could clear himself by posing as a new arrival in the Northwest, having come by the way of the Ohio; or he might say he was a special agent through from Tennessee, or that he had made a long circle at the behest of Haldimand, Lieutenant Governor of Canada. By these means he could gain inside councils. It meant a far more dangerous rôle, and it demanded swifter action. Already the ranger he had met near Vin-

cennes constituted an awkward obstacle. He must get his information quickly and pull out. With that decision he fell asleep, utterly exhausted.

They were on the trail again in the gray of morning, pushing northeastward. Midnight brought them to Ouiatanon. Girty, impatient and overbearing, found the Detroit party gone on. He tore around the stockade like a madman, roaring curses.

Girty and Cheves slept that night in a far part of the fort, and relieved of watchfulness, they slept deep, not hearing the quiet entry of another party. Before daylight Girty was up, growling at Cheves that it was time to be on their way.

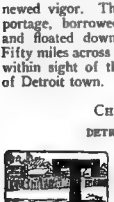
The newcomers were stretched on the hard ground of the court. Cheves, looking at them, saw only the blur of a white face raise up and turn toward him. No word was said; the man dropped back to his blanket again; Cheves followed Girty beyond the fort wall, the sentry banged shut the door and thrust home the bolt. On trail once again.

Thus far did Cheves and Parmenter miss each other at Ouiatanon, for it was the latter who had raised and stared, unknowingly, at the two men passing out of the fort not ten feet from him.

Up the long narrowing bend of the Wabash Girty hurried, following the river as it slanted eastward. Two days' march brought the rangers to the main column in the Twigtwee country. It was rougher going now, but the lure of the capital drew them on and instilled tired legs with renewed vigor. They crossed the Maumee portage, borrowed Pottawatomie canoes, and floated down the river to the lake. Fifty miles across open water brought them within sight of the gray, heavy palisades of Detroit town.

Chapter IV

DETROIT TOWN!



THE canoes brought up at the King's Wharf, a structure built of heavy logs split in half and covered by planking adzed smooth. Gray and weather-worn, it stood solidly into the river. For nearly eighty years it had seen the departure of the fur brigades into the North and had witnessed them come sweeping back, singing their lusty free songs of river and wine, with the gunwales of their craft slipping low to the weight of hundreds of bales of priceless fur gathered west and north of Michillimackinac.

The party ascended the embankment, went through the huge timbered door and were within the town.

Detroit had started with a small stockade by the river. Each additional house and each additional alley stretched the walls until now the town inside the palisades contained about sixty houses and more than two thousand people, mostly French-Canadian. Outside the palisades the Frenchmen had long, narrow farms extending back from the river. It was natural that Detroit should start with a large water frontage and taper as it proceeded toward the forest, with the houses giving way to a large parade ground, beyond which was the Fort. There was scant regularity to the crooked alleys. The palisades could be entered by gates at the east and west, and also at the two wharfs, King's and Merchants'.

Girty led the party, single-file, through the alleys. Small, low-hanging houses made of logs and rough board fronted the street. Cheves caught sight of piled counters and shelves, while at intervals the proprietors came to the doors and threw effusive greetings at him. They passed a wine shop and Girty suppressed a bolt.

"You keep them whistles dry ontil we reach the fort!" he growled.

Winding and twisting they crossed the parade ground worn hard by many tramping feet, and arrived at the fort gate. The fort formed a part of the town wall, yet was itself palisaded from Detroit by a bastioned barrier. A sentry challenged the party.

"Hell, I'm Jim Girt!" answered the agent. Restraint of any kind angered him. "Party from Weetanon. Put down that stabber an' let us by!"

They passed into the yard, flanked by officers' quarters, barracks and general store rooms. Girty seemed to know his way, striding across the square and through a doorway where Cheves, entering, found himself in a guard room. A lieutenant rose as they entered.

"Hallo, Girty. You're back early. What luck?"

"Found 'em and took hair," the agent reported, drawing a significant hand across his neck.

The officer slapped the table. "Good! The governor will want to hear that right off." Girty nodded. The officer turned to Cheves. "Don't believe I know you,"

he said, a professional mask dropping across his face.

"Carstairs is my name," said Cheves, "from Kaskaskia."

"Lieutenant Eltinge," explained Girty to the Virginian. The two shook hands.

"From Kaskaskia?" Interest thawed the lieutenant. "Been looking for word from there for more than six months. Place might have been sacked for all we know. What's up?"

No news from Kaskaskia for a half year! The talkative young subaltern had unwittingly taken a great load from the Virginian's mind. He was safe until despatches did arrive from that distant outpost.

"Bad news," he returned. "I had despatches."

"Saukees got him," interrupted Girty. "Was headin' him straight for the Illinoy when I come up." He grew restless. "Go in and tell the governor we're here, will you?"

The lieutenant, checked in his gossip, rose with reluctance and disappeared through the door.

"He's harmless," said Girty, ranging the small room. "Not snobbish like most of 'em. Got a lot of book learnin', I hear. Hell of a lot of good it's doin' him here!"

Cheves was preoccupied with the coming interview. Luck had played with him so far, save in one instance. The thing which would most establish his position was the corroborative testimony of Girty, a trusted agent. And Girty had a good tale to report. He had pumped and cross-questioned the Virginian all along the Maumee River until finally he confessed himself satisfied.

"It sounded fishy at first," he told Cheves. I know most rangers hereabouts, that's what got me. Can't take anybody on their face. If I'd been convinced you was Virginian you wouldn't ha' lived five minutes." And the Irishman's sullen eyes flashed with a diabolical humor.

The masquerading had been far easier than Cheves had dared to expect. Too easy, he thought.

Eltinge came out.

"Go right in," he directed, holding open the door. "Governor's very anxious to see you both. Mind stopping on your way out, Carstairs, for a little chat? Been trying to get down to that country on brigade for a year."

Cheves assented and passed down a dark corridor. At places store rooms broke the hallway like bayous in a creek, and they opened and closed three different doors before coming to the entrance of the governor's office. Girty strode boldly through.

"Back again," he announced gruffly.

The very contrast of the place astounded Cheves, unused as he was to seeing luxury in any western building. Coming from undressed timber and split puncheons, he now stood in what was undoubtedly the finest, most pretentious room in the west country. The stained walls were covered with furs and an incalculable array of Indian blankets, beadwork and weapons. Immense polar and grizzly bear hides covered the floor. Around two walls ran a shelf of books four tiers high. A couch held place in one corner, draped by a silver fox robe. In the center stood a mahogany desk, from behind which the governor had but recently risen.

S FOR Hamilton, Cheves found him to be one of those indeterminate persons who seem never to possess a striking characteristic by which they may be remembered. Medium in build, tending to corpulency; no great amount of expression on his face in repose, but showing traces of latent nervous excitability, hair graying; possessing an English shopkeeper's features. He seemed, of all men, to be the least fit for governing his wild dominion and the least capable of carrying out a ruthless frontier war. And yet he was doing just that. He was the man whose name spelled anathema to every border settler.

"Glad to see you, Girty," he said in a short, hurried voice.

Cheves introduced himself. Girty broke through formalities in his restless way and delivered his news. Hamilton's eyes lit with animation.

"You got them all, Girty? Good—good, very good! Now we sha'n't be bothered by insurrection for a while. It must have been an affair!"

"'Twas!" replied the ranger in a sudden flash of pride. "Wish to God you'd do the same with the Americans. Saw half a dozen prisoners in the yard. Prisoners ain't no good. Use the knife. That'll make 'em cringe!"

The governor's face set with determination. "You can't scalp a helpless man, Girty."

"Better if you did," growled the agent.

"Damn it, man!" exploded Hamilton,

"I won't have my hands dipped outright in blood! The world calls me murderer as it is. Understand?" He saw dissent in the ranger's face and turned impatiently to Cheves. "Now, sir, tell me of Kaskaskia. Where are you from? I haven't met you before."

"From my Lord Carleton. I had some documents for you, but the Saukees got them."

"Carleton—Carleton! What has he to do with you!"

"I came by way of New York, toured the Pennsylvania country, got to Fort Pitt and enlisted in a flat-boat company down the Ohio as far as the falls. From there I went to the Holston country. Strayed into St. Louis as an independent trader and then made my way to Kaskaskia," Cheves explained.

"What's the news from east of the mountains? I never hear a thing. No despatches from New York for a month."

"The rebel Washington has reached the end of his tether."

"Ah, they grow weak!" Hamilton exulted. "Now Kaskaskia?"

Cheves unfolded his perfected tale of intrigue and plot. Of Spanish designs, of a thousand details which kept the governor on the edge of his chair. Cheves played the man for double purposes. Above all he must get the governor's confidence and secure an exchange of vital news. What were Hamilton's designs on the far southern corner of the Illinois triangle? What schemes were they harboring against Ohio and the Pennsylvania frontier? Of late there had been whispers of a great Indian uprising. What truth to it? And above all things—what of Detroit's vulnerability? So Cheves spread his web of words. He cherished the wild plan of working Hamilton to a state where a detachment of troops might be sent down to Kaskaskia from Detroit, thus weakening the main garrison. He, Cheves, would go along, run ahead to warn Clark and ambush them. Detroit would be wide open, then.

When he had finished Hamilton leaned back and closed his eyes. For a long period he seemed to be thinking. Of a sudden he startled Cheves by observing, "Carstairs, you sound like a Virginian."

Cheves forced a smile and turned to Girty.

"Your same suspicion," he said; and was further alarmed to see the sudden hardening, the sudden freshening of suspicion in the ranger's sullen face. "Damned if I didn't think so, too, Governor. But he's got a good yarn."

"It's nothing, perhaps," said the governor. "That's all, Carstairs. Stay in the fort until I get my correspondence ready for return. Girty, I've got something for you."

Cheves acknowledged the dismissal and went down the hall. He would have given much to have overheard the rest of Hamilton's talk to Girty. At the door he found Eltinge shuffling disinterestedly through a book. He dropped it quickly.

"Ah, back to chat with me," the British officer welcomed. "Have a real Virginian cigar. Pretty rare nowadays. I've a friend who smuggles them through. Let's take a turn about the yard."

The smoke was a luxury and Cheves said so.

"I'll get you a handful after a bit," rejoined Eltinge. "Wanted to talk with you. Minute I heard your voice I spotted another University man. I think I'm the only Oxford chap west of Montreal. I get very tired of hearing jargon. What's your school?"

"William and Mary's," answered Cheves truthfully. It was a ticklish business, this mixing of truth and fiction, but it served his purpose; and he saw by Eltinge's face that he had established another contact with the circle he most needed to move in during the next few days.

ELTINGE launched a storm of questions and Cheves began a description of the Ohio country which lasted for many turns about the yard. A bugle call brought the stroll to a halt.

"First mess call," said Eltinge. "Come to my quarters and we'll clean up. You're my guest at officers' table tonight. Anybody arranged to bunk you. No? I'll attend to it."

A second call drew them to an inner part of the fort where Cheves was admitted to a low, heavily rafters room lit by innumerable candles. A blazing fireplace dominated the scene and in the center of the chamber was a long table, around which some ten officers were gathered. Eltinge directed Cheves to a seat.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Carstairs, on king's business from Kaskaskia," he announced.

After that the Virginian found himself busy detailing his tour for the officers' en-

tertainment. When the meal was over he left the hall and returned to the open court.

"I believe I'll take a swing around the town," he told Eltinge. "It looks interesting."

"Would go along were I not on guard," Eltinge replied. "But be a little careful. We don't have entire harmony in Detroit. Too many French-Canadians—and there's a small group of American sympathizers we can't lay our fingers on. Three weeks ago a ranger who'd just come in from Little Miames disappeared, and we never did find him. So watch the dark alleys."

The Virginian strolled through the main gate as the late twilight faded into dark. Winking lights gleamed across the parade ground over which he walked, gradually approaching the mouth of a narrow alley. Somewhere a bell tinkled, sounding clear and full in the quiet evening air. To Cheves it was blessed relaxation after the weary travel. Here for a brief time he might loiter.

The alley enveloped him with its darker shadows. Once he flattened against the wall to permit a horse and cart to pass. The driver, probably late in his return home, urged the weary animal forward with unwonted grunts. The outfit creaked and clattered into the night. Cheves went on and came to an intersection, then drifted aimlessly to a new alley, absorbing the sounds and sights and vagrant smells of this far-famed western capital. Sounds of violins came from many houses. Windows of dressed oilskins drawn taut over frames let out yellow shafts of dim light. The door of a wine shop opened suddenly in the street and Cheves walked in, seating himself at a vacant table. The low-ceilinged room was filled with smoke and the babble of many men. A buxom girl of twenty or so came up for his order.

"W'at you 'ave?"

"A glass of port," returned Cheves.

He was aware of being keenly inspected by the men of the place. A natural thing, he decided, for here were typical Frenchmen, while himself was labeled from head to foot as Anglo-Saxon. Well, let them inspect. He did not care. Perfect serenity pervaded him this one evening. Surely he could drop his guard for a short time.

He did not see four men slip quietly from the door, for his eyes were fixed on the glint of light through the dull red color of his wine. It was excellent port and felt tremendously good on the flat of his tongue. After the second glass he paid his bill and walked out.

At first it was utterly dark and he stood in the middle of the street, arms slightly forward for protection, while his eyes became accustomed to the night. His ears, always sharp and attentive, caught a scraping of feet nearby. For a moment he thought of Eltinge's warning, but his guard was relaxed and he could not bring himself to realize danger. He groped forward.

It was absolutely dark. Only the faint lights through the oilskin windows guided him. The alleys gave way to another intersection, broader and lighter. He paused, deciding to return to the fort. It was useless to grope through the town; he would see it under the better light of day. Turning, he re-entered the alley.

Beyond the wine shop he heard the scraping of feet for a second time, now closer by. He could not disregard this, and instinct threw him against a wall. Two shadowed figures advanced through the blackness and stopped before him. Cheves could not distinguish their faces.

"Pardon, monsieur, but is it that you know the way to King's Wharf?" one of the men requested. "We 'ave just come in by bateaux. Thees town is strange."

"I think it's down this alley," returned Cheves.

He turned unsuspectingly to point the way. It was a fatal move. In some manner two men had slipped along the wall, behind him. When he turned they were upon him. A club came down on his head with the force of a ton of lead. A streak of pain and red light shot through his brain. Falling forward, he had this last thought, too late to help him. "Ambushed again!"

Oblivion closed over him.

CHAPTER V

OUTSIDE THE STOCKADE

THE awakening of Cheves was by far the most painful event of his life. A thumping headache was his memento of the attack, and his whole body caught up and repeated the throb. A musty smell filled his nostrils and he seemed to be tossing back and forth in space. He tried to wet his lips, and then was aware of being gagged. As his senses flooded back, he determined to rip off that impediment, but when he

moved his arms he found them trussed to his body. A kick of the feet revealed them likewise bound.

"*Ehu, ehu,*" came a tobacco-cracked voice. "*Nom du nom, allez vite.*"

The grunt of the cartwheels, the grumble of the driver—and he, Richard Cheve, bound on some unknown journey beneath a pile of straw. The car hit a rut and climbed out with a jar; the pain became too great and the Virginian dropped away to a far land, hearing the stentorian cry of a sentry, "Halt there!"

The next thing he experienced was the teetering of the cart on a dirt road and the *plock, plock* of the horse's feet. A fresher air filtered through the straw and his head felt immeasurably better. If he might only relieve his chafed wrists of the rope and his cramped mouth of the gag.

"Get on! François, prod that beast! We can't be all night on the road!" a second man said.

"Eh? W'at you t'ink dat horse can do?" responded the gruff voice. Cheves recognized it now as belonging to the man who had passed him in the cart earlier that night. "He ees no race horse. W'at you t'ink?"

"I know, I know. But prod him along." The second voice was that of an Anglo-Saxon, Cheves could not be mistaken about that. "We've got to get under cover before some sort of general alarm goes out."

"By gar, dat's right," assented a third voice. "Dat sentry, he look ver' close on us w'en we pass by dis time. I t'ink mebbe he got suspicions of men w'at travel by de night time. Speak to dat animal, François."

Thus encouraged, the driver lustily cursed the horse in fluent Gallic patois, using tongue, hands and feet to express his purpose. The animal must have long been acclimated to its driver, for Cheves could feel no appreciable difference in the gait. At last the old man grew angry, and the Virginian heard him climb off the vehicle, run ahead in his clumsy sabots, and strike the horse on the withers. The cart gave a quick jump forward.

"That's it, François. Prod him along. Work that animal more and give him less oats. He's overfed and lazy."

It was becoming insufferable on the bottom of the awkward contrivance. Cheves could endure it no longer, and summoning the whole of his energy he gave a desperate heave and raised up. The hay cascaded about him, and the blessed star spangled sky broke clear overhead. Simultaneously the two men remaining on the cart turned about.

"Hah, de fish he 'ave flopped," observed the younger Frenchman. His face broke into a sardonic grin.

Cheves was not so much interested in him as in the other man; a young, clean cut fellow, evidently not over twenty-five, dressed in homespun which fit snugly over a compact, muscular frame. His not unhandsome face, plainly visible in the clear starlit night, surveyed Cheves with a sober noncommittal gaze.

"You gave him a heavy clout, Pierre," he observed. "More than you needed to!"

"Bah!" said the younger Frenchman in disgust. "Dese Engleesh 'ave ver' strong heads. No t'ing can bodder dem. Eet was just a lettle tap d'amour."

"We're not midnight assassins," the leader frowned, surveying the Virginian's face carefully. "You look dashed uncomfortable there, my friend. Also you appear to have some kind of intelligence. Most British rangers don't," he continued. "Now, if I take off that gag will you promise to keep your mouth shut. On your honor?"

Cheves nodded vigorously.

"No!" said Pierre. "Don' take no trust in any o' dem killers!"

"I have your promise?" persisted the other man.

Cheves again nodded his head. Pierre gave a sigh of disapproval and turned away; his partner moved forward and relieved the Virginian with a few deft turns of the bandanna. The latter could not have said a word at that moment if he had so desired; his jaw muscles were half paralyzed. Carefully he twisted his mouth to lessen the pain, wetting bruised lips and tentatively biting them lightly to massage back the blood.

"Better, isn't it?" asked the man in homespun.

Cheves nodded, essaying a half inaudible, "Thanks."

The road they were following kept close to the river, winding through sandy fields and many orchards. Whitewashed houses and barns showed in the distance along the route, resembling so many sheeted ghosts marching across the country side. A mile or more behind the cart Cheves made out the palisades of Detroit. Suddenly the horse turned off the main river road and went along a ruttier, less traveled way.

"You'll have to lie down," was the curt order.

Cheves obeyed promptly. He had no

mind to be obstinate now; it was futile, and moreover he had given his word. For another quarter hour he watched the sky, while the cart jostled and bumped through an unusually large orchard. The outlines of a barn showed over the sideboards, and finally the elderly Frenchman trudging by his horse gave a brief grunt. The cart stopped; the men dismounted, and Cheves waited the next move.

A few whispered words reached him; the head of the cart dropped as the horse was unhitched and led away. Pierre crawled over the sideboard and cut the rope with a swift slash.

"Climb out, m'sieur, but don' try to run off," he directed. A long-barreled, unwieldy pistol appeared from beneath his coat.

It required some effort for the Virginian to reach the ground. He stamped his legs and swung his long-fettered arms to restore circulation. The exercise set his head to throbbing more painfully and he desisted. Running a hand over his face and head he was surprised to find the amount of blood caked thereon. The blunt weapon had cut the scalp badly, and the furrow lay open to the touch of his finger. A gust of anger swept him, and he turned to Pierre.

"I'd like to have an even break with you some time with my fists, my friend," he said. "I think I'd pay you back for this."

A sardonic grin was the reply.

"Any time, m'sieu," the Frenchman promised.

"That's enough of that," the leader of the party cut in. "Shut up, Pierre. As for you, mister British Ranger, you're devilish lucky to get off with a plain blow." For the first time Cheves heard heat and bitterness creep into the voice. "Your cursed cut-throat Indians use scalping knives; I guess you shouldn't be bellyachin' over a little tap. All right, bring him along, Pierre."

An orderly pathway bordered by whitewashed stones led from the barn to a house sitting amidst a grove of trees. They came by this house, went to the rear and opened a trap door to the cellar.

"Step down," Cheves was invited. "At the foot of the steps you'll find yourself between two bins. Go straight ahead ten paces or so and there'll be a roll of tarpaulin. That'll be your bed for the night, mister British Ranger. I wouldn't bother about looking for ways to get out. There's no windows and only two doors. The one up to the kitchen is locked. This one will be also. I suspect that Pierre or François will be nearby most of the night. Both are good shots."

Cheves accepted the situation without a word of protest. Throughout his whole life he had pursued one plan of action: Be a good Indian until the breaks of luck came.

If none came, then there would still be plenty of time left for desperate action. He had emerged victorious from many a straitened and grim situation by this method. Just now his muscles hardy obeyed his will and in his enfeebled condition he eagerly embraced the opportunity for rest. Slowly he descended, bending his head to pass the sill. The doors closed over him and a hasp fell audibly on a staple lock. It was pitch dark.

Following directions he crept along a dirt floor, hands touching parallel bins. He found an apple in one and took it. Farther on his foot struck the tarpaulin and he knelt down to smooth out a fold of the stiff, tar-scented fabric, making a rough bed. Into this he crept, and dragged a lap of it over him as best he could, munching the apple. Finally he fell into a fitful sleep, miserable and cold, and with this one thought haunting him: his pursuers were doubtless nearing the city; the messenger from Kaskaskia might come in at any moment; and here he shook and shivered in a dank cellar while his chances in Detroit grew thinner and more desperate.

Chapter VI

THE SURPRISE

E DID not see dawn come, but the shuffling of feet overhead heralded breakfast and the new day. After a while heavier steps tramped across the floor; a scraping of chairs and feet ensued. It all whetted the Virginian's appetite and made him sorely conscious of his hurts. Yet, for all the buffeting received, he found himself clear of head and lacking only some kind of food to be stout and fit for service. He rose and groped to the apple bin. Apples helped, but it was hot tea he needed to thaw out the cramped muscles.

A trap door opened from above.

"Come up," a voice commanded.

A shaft of yellow candle light revealed the way; he got through and stood in the kitchen. The two Frenchmen of the night

before were there and in addition a buxom mulatto presided over the kettles hung in the hearth.

Pierre held the same clumsy pistol. With it he motioned toward the kitchen table, where Cheves sat down without a word and ate what came before him. The meal performed wonders for him, restoring his strength and refurbishing his battered self respect. This latter quality had fluttered low in the night; now again he could wait with smiling confidence for his turn in the swift, uncertain passage of events. Meanwhile he had figured out for himself one puzzle. These Frenchmen were probably servants of the young leaders—not servants in the usual sense, however, inasmuch as the man had allowed them considerable freedom of speech. A closer bond of interest held them together, and that bond, Cheves guessed, was a common hatred of the British. Well, they had gone to a lot of trouble and hazarded their lives to kidnap a Virginian who wanted nothing so much as to be back inside the walls where he might do some good to their common cause.

But did he dare tell of his true identity? A thousand prying ears might overhear and carry the news to town. There might be counter spies. Would they believe him? He doubted it.

He drank the last of the third hot cup of tea and leaned back. That was a signal for François, who had watched him like a cat, to disappear through a door. Presently he returned and directed at Cheves the single word, "Come!"

The Virginian followed with alacrity, for he hoped now that he might get to the core of this mystery. A hallway opened into a large, well furnished living room. The breakfast table had been recently abandoned and drawn aside, the dishes still on it, while two men sat before a fireplace and smoked morning pipes. Cheves, giving first a casual glance to the younger, knew him as the leader of the previous night. Then he turned his eyes to the elder and received a great shock.

The man had risen and stood supporting his spare, bent frame on the back of a chair. His white unpowdered hair, his blue-gray eyes, his thin aquiline nose, his whole proud, redoubtable carriage—Cheves recognized them all in one astonished wave of joy and relief.

"Colonel Ralston!" he exclaimed.

"Richard Cheves! I'm not mistaken, by gad!" The man fumbled for his spectacles. "My old eyes have been going back on me, Dick. Come here, man, and let me see you!

"Hardly knew you under all that gore," Ralston continued angrily. "That slugger Pierre came near bashing in your skull! I shall have to cane him, by gad! You've hardened, Dick—I see it! But you're Richard Cheves, of Cheves' Courthouse, Virginia. Three years since I've seen you. By gad, it's a wonderful thing to see your own kind after mixing with the breeds and puddin' eaters!" Of a sudden the old man's fingers dug into Cheves' arm. "What are you doin' in that British garrison, and movin' around through the country with James Girty?" he asked fiercely. "Don't tell me you're a turn-coat. I'll not believe that of a Virginian."

"I imagine, Colonel, we are both playing the same game, after the same ends," Cheves retorted shrewdly. "You went to a lot of trouble to catch one of your own fowls."

"Best catching John has done for a long while," said Ralston. "Dick, let me introduce John Harkness. I think we two are the only white American men left in Detroit." His voice grew sad. "They've weeded us out mighty fast. Were I not such an old and rickety and helpless looking fellow I think my turn would have come long ago. But they don't suspect me."

"How did you know I was with Girty?" queried Cheves.

"News travels fast," replied Ralston, sitting down. "I know more about Hamilton's business than he does himself." His eyes snapped with a quick fire. "I've got an organization that'll drain his little well dry some of these days. Oh, if I only had force to back up my information! Information my men get from right under his nose! We know every last one of his precious secrets. That bit of a dishrag, Hamilton! Pah! And that lumbering, barbarous, conceited Dejean! They can't down us, no matter how many men they line up against the wall or export from the country. They haven't been able to discover the leak yet. We've been too clever."

"I heard you did away with a ranger a short while ago," Cheves remarked.

Ralston smiled gently.

"We play for high stakes, Dick. Can't always be too nice about the means. But a little gold found this fellow's heart; we didn't have to go farther. He's alive and safe and a good many hundred miles from here."

"Do you think it wise to tell so much,"

Harkness broke in quickly. "It may be that he——"

"What? Doubt a Virginian I've known since he was born?" said Ralston with irritation. "Why, I'd trust him with my life, as I do right now." He sighed. "Dick, if only I had something to strengthen my hand," he sighed, and turned to Cheves with a fresh interest. "You've come from the Illinois country. Tell me, what's goin' on down there? A bit of gossip came out from the Pennsylvania settlements last spring about George Rogers Clark going down the Ohio for some purpose. What's it mean? What'd he do?"

"That," returned Cheves, very soberly, "is why I'm here."

Excitement caught both men at once. "What for? Why?" queried Ralston, throwing the questions after each other. "I've heard mutterings and whispers and guesses and all manner of things come out of the lower country, but never any definite fact I could base hopes on. What is it?"

"I left Clark at Massac, seventy-five miles from Kaskaskia. He told me I should find him there or that I should find him dead. He has a mind to take Detroit, if ever a fair chance comes. That's why I'm here, to find what Hamilton's plans are."

IT SEEMED as though twenty years dropped from the Colonel in the single jubilant gesture of his hand.

"By gad, I can help, then! My work hasn't been for nothing! My coming here was of use!" He got up and strode around the room. "You've come for facts? I can give you nearly all you'll want. We'll scourge 'em out of the country! Did I tell you why I came here? All because, two years ago, Washington rode over from his winter camp and met me at Chester, in the Red Lion Tavern—a few miles out of Philadelphia, that is—and asked me to come. He only said a word or so, but it uprooted me from Virginia and sent me here to do what I could. I worked a long line of alleged English connections, got into New York, rode into the Provinces as a loyalist and came here. I'll always remember one thing Washington said. 'It's possible that nothing may come of the venture, sir,' he warned me. 'But someone must be in Detroit; for it may be that a force can get through. Then we shall need your information.' That's the thing which has heartened me to the task. And now it's to be used!"

"Well," returned Cheves, "it may come to pass. I've come eight hundred miles and I've suffered a few times on the way. But that's no matter. If we can get hold of the Illinois forts and Detroit, that will be the end of the British in the Northwest."

Gray dawn had given away to the first approaches of the sun. Another fair day came, with its burden resting heavier on these men. They sat, each inspecting the other, hope struggling to overcome the odds of fear and sad experience. Throughout the talk one great question had been uppermost in Cheves' mind, and only pride kept him from asking it. He hoped that the Colonel himself would let slip what he was most anxious to know.

"It would be months before Clark could get here," mused Ralston. "That would mean a fall campaign, snow, and privation. I'm afraid."

"You don't know Clark," returned Cheves, his mind only half on the conversation, for he was recalling the bitter memory of an ill-starred day when a duel and a note from a girl blotted out his dreams of happiness. Well, all that was now behind him forever. Doubtless she was managing the Ralston plantation, after the manner of the Virginia women, while her father struggled here in Detroit. Waiting at home with her heart set on that dog, Parmenter! An unreasoning wave of fear and jealousy ran through Cheves at the thought. No matter. As long as she chose to doubt him unjustly he would never try to correct the error.

A light step sounded behind him, a door closed. He turned, and on the instant had jerked himself out of the chair, standing very erect, ice and fire running through him. There stood Katherine Ralston!

She had come from upstairs and was but recently risen; sleep still clung to the lids of her eyes, and the lusty blood of day had not yet filled her cheeks. But beyond all that she was beautiful. Yes, she was beautiful! Cheves, looking at her with a kind of pride-ridden, hungry despair, knew that whatever came in the years to follow he could not scourge the sweet vision of her from his heart. So he stood, irresolute, wishing he were gone, wishing he had the courage to take her into his arms, wishing he had not so much pride, wishing he had more.

For her part, a moment's inspection of this strange, bearded, blood-smeared man

had not revealed his identity; but when he made the short bow and she saw the curl and color of his hair and recognized the mannerism of his movement, she knew.

The flush of blood stained her cheeks and a hand went up toward her heart. A dark mass of hair, done up in a loose knot, set off the sweet oval of her face, on which many contrasting emotions mingled—a high courage, pride, sympathy, and a sudden concern. Her father rose, his voice trembling just a bit as he spoke.

"Katherine," said he, "do you recognize our visitor? The Lord never brought us a more welcome one."

She extended her hand.

"Richard, I—we are glad to see you here." The tone of the greeting, low and sweet, went to his heart like the barb of a Shawnee lance. With a remnant of old fashioned courtesy he took her hand and bent over it.

"I am glad to be here," he stammered.

She gave a quick gasp. "What have they done to you! Your head!"

"Oh, that confounded Pierre!" Ralston's voice filled with anger. "John, you must watch that always. I've told you many a time there's no need for undue violence. We are not common sluggers. Dick, I hope you'll pardon us for the heavy blow."

Cheves laughed, and found himself surprised at the lift of his spirit.

"I've endured worse things," he replied.

"But they left you all night that way; in our cellar! Oh, how very, very foolish! John, I'm ashamed of you," she reproached.

Harkness flushed. He had been an interested spectator of this scene, his eyes seeking first the girl's face, then Cheves'. Now he turned to the window.

"It's as the Colonel says," he explained shortly. "A fortune of war. How was I to know?"

"'Tis nothing," assured Cheves.

Katherine turned to the kitchen.

"Richard, come with me," she directed. "We must fix that cut before it gets worse."

CHEVES followed her out, with the unsmiling eyes of Harkness staring at them both. By the time the Virginian got to the kitchen she had already filled a basin with hot water from the tea kettle. From some small closet she drew tattered bits of linen and cotton cloth, ripping these into regular strips.

"Sit in that chair," she commanded. "All night with your head in the cold. What a savage, unkind country this is—even with men like my father and John! I wish I had known!"

His heart jumped at that, and the next moment, sank. After all, she would have felt the same pity toward the worst, most degraded man in the Northwest. His face drew tighter.

"Do I hurt you?" she asked.

"No. I was thinking of other things."

She sponged the last of the caked blood into the pan and began wrapping the bandages about his head.

"You are always thinking of something far off, Richard. It has always been that way." A trace of sadness came to her words. "Am I so depressing as all that?"

Depressing! Good Lord! Cheves thought.

"I was only thinking," he replied, "of why you did this for me; since I am what you believe me to be—what another man said I was. Why do you do it?"

"Let's not quarrel again, Dick. Time changes so many things. So many, many things." She started to say something else, but stopped. Cheves, wrapped in his own thoughts, struggling with his own desire to utter his grievance, did not note the implication of the unspoken words.

"Time!" he said bitterly. "Time doesn't do a thing, save score the old wounds deeper. Never tell me that time softens anything! I've sat awake a hundred nights, trying to puzzle things out—and can't."

"Dick—" her voice fell low—"there isn't so much to puzzle over."

"Parmenter," he broke in. "You believed him, let him paw around your sympathies, and never listened to a word from me."

"Richard, you never came to explain! What was I to think? I saw you knock him down like a street bully; the next day you nearly killed him in a duel. I heard people whisper. Nobody told me a thing. I grew angry at what you had done to him and wrote you that note—and you never came back! Oh, that was the thing which hurt me so much! You never came back to explain! I would have listened!"

The mulatto had left the kitchen long before. They were alone, fighting out the battle so very, very old; stumbling across new facts that seemed to change the whole face of the quarrel; trying desperately to be fair, to tell all without hurting;

trying to keep pride from spoiling everything again.

"And then Parmenter came to you and you believed all he said; that I was a bully and a liar," Cheves charged.

"For a while, Dick, just for a while. Then I knew him better and sent him away, to tell you to come back. And you didn't come!"

"Sent him away?" Cheves turned swiftly.

She nodded, eyes clear and brilliant. "To tell you to come back."

He took a deep breath.

"He never told me that. When I saw him, at Wheeling, a year ago, he never told me that. He said you had promised to marry him, after the war. He came down the Ohio with me from Fort Pitt—and told me you had promised him——" A great overwhelming weight seemed to be slipping from Cheves, and a new hope came in its stead.

"Oh, what a mess I made of it!" he groaned. "I didn't know."

"Time—time does so much," she said wistfully. "Richard, while you were gone I found—I found——," and again she failed to say the thing within her. But now he heard the pause, sprang up and came closer.

"Found what?" he insisted.

She summoned her courage, keeping her eyes upon him in the mute hope that he might not misunderstand. "That there never was any man, Dick, save you. It doesn't matter now, I guess. But whatever happened, I didn't care what you had done. There never was a place in my heart for Danny Parmenter."

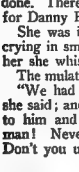
She was in his arms the next moment, crying in small, stifled sobs. As he kissed her she whispered, "It has been so long."

The mulatto's footsteps drew them apart.

"We had better go back to Dad now," she said; and in the hallway she leaned up to him and whispered, "you queer, dear man! Never leave me like that again. Don't you understand a woman?"

CHAPTER VII

A LIE FOR VENGEANCE



IGHT, and the white-washed farmhouse again bulked vaguely through the soft summer night. Within, Cheves was ready to start on a return trip to the town.

"It will not be difficult," he reassured Col. Ralston. "I'll find a way. By the river, I think."

They had spent the day exchanging notes. Cheves told of the events beyond the Alleghanies; Ralston revealed a store of strategical secrets concerning Detroit. Privately to Katherine the Virginian had disclosed the main items of his western pilgrimages since they had quarreled; but one thing he did keep from her—the full extent of Parmenter's defection. If she did not know the depths of that gentleman's character, Cheves decided, then he would not tell her.

"Be careful of the river's undertow," warned the colonel. "If you swim around the stockade stay close to the shore. It's a dangerous river. I wish," he continued regretfully, "you'd stay here and let my agents get what little you need to know now. It's risky for you to be inside those walls. My men'll know as soon as any decision is made. You can start back to Clark from here. Won't be the danger of running into the real Kaskaskia messenger then."

But the thought of hiding out from danger, the thought of shirking first-hand sources, was distasteful to Cheves and he shook his head. "I'd best do this myself. You've told me things that will make Clark everlastingly grateful," he insisted. "Now I must go and see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears."

"Very well," sighed Ralston. "But above all things, remember Detroit is weak. Only a handful guard it. A hundred determined men could take it easily, with a little surprise. And once it's taken there'll be no more Indian raids on the frontier."

Cheves rose and shook Ralston's hand. He only nodded to Harkness who stood nearby, for some inexplicable and mutual dislike animated these two men and edged their words.

"You, sir," said Cheves, "I wish luck, and I hope you'll keep these people from danger."

"I will," Harkness nodded shortly.

Cheves turned to the door and found Katherine Ralston there, waiting for him. Together they stepped out into the night and walked down the pathway, past the barn. Midway they came upon the two Frenchmen who stepped from their road and touched a hand to their caps. Next moment they had disappeared into the night. Katherine shivered and gripped Cheves' arm more closely.

"Oh, Dick, this is a cold, cold, deceiving place in which to live. I'm not sure—

not sure," she whispered.

"Not sure of what?"

"Many queer things happen, Dick. One never knows who is a friend and who is not. Many things have happened to make me distrust even those men. And I sometimes find John looking at me with a queer stare that makes my blood run cold. It's like having a knife forever at your throat."

A wild impulse swept Cheves to turn and tell this lovable girl he would not go back to the town, that he would stay here and fend for her, be some comfort to her in a grim and suspicious country. He smothered that impulse with a savage, silent reproach. There was work to do; he had followed his duty through a thousand weary miles and must continue on until that duty was done.

"I wish," he said gently, "that I could stay. I can't, though."

She held his arm and forced a brave little laugh.

"Oh, it's just that I get terribly nervous. It's all right, Dick. Nothing's wrong and I wouldn't keep you back; that would be selfish. But some day, some day——"

"Yes," said he.

They had got by the barn. Suddenly she turned and drew him off the path to a nearby tree.

"I can't help feeling strange, Dick. Do you see this rock?" It sat at the foot of the tree, just small enough to move with some effort. "Well, if anything should happen—if something should go wrong—I'll leave a little note under it for you. Remember."

"What do you expect to go wrong?" Cheves asked.

"I don't know! I wish I did. There's just two people in the world I can trust, father and you. The country seems to breed suspicion into my bones. There's things I feel but can't understand. But it's just womanish fancy, I guess. You mustn't worry about it, Dick."

He stood, looking ahead at a winking light which came from a farmhouse, a half mile distant.

"I'll come back, on my way south," he promised. "I'll see you again. And as long as I live——"

He turned and kissed her, held her for a moment, then with a whispered word started down the pathway. A soft "good-by" reached him as the darkness blotted out the outline of the barn.

His path was much the same as that by which he had come, following a rutty by-way through an orchard, turning and twisting a dozen times in its course to the larger river road. Setting foot on this broader, more substantial highway he struck directly toward Detroit town, paralleling the river.

A world of doubt and misgiving rose to worry him on the trip down that dark and silent road. After all, Ralston was an old man, while Katherine was a woman, lovely and appealing, and because of that a greater bait for some ruthless individual in this land of physical force. About these two people were doubtful henchmen. Perhaps—spies.

Cheves, inured to the frontier, trusted no one until reason for trust had been evidenced. And now he doubted Harkness. True, he was forced to admit that jealousy perhaps played a part; but setting that aside he could not read sincerity or loyalty into that somber face. He gritted his teeth. More of this reasoning and he'd turn back. Resolutely he banished it.

THE sudden shuffle of advancing feet threw him off the road and flat on his stomach—a file of six Indians went by. He got up and resumed his journey, shortly to make out the wall. Now he left the road and struck dingonally across a meadow, touched the solid bulk of the wall and followed it down a hundred yards to the river bank. The heavy logs marched on out into the water for a dozen feet or more.

The boil and eddy of the midstream current came clearly to his ears, the backwash rolled up and lapped against the shore. He went to the bank's edge and tried to discern his path, but all he might see was the stockade wall marching out into the murky water and losing itself in the night. He knew that once beyond the wall he had to swim four or five hundred yards before reaching King's Wharf; that was the total sum of his knowledge. Well, there was nothing to do but go ahead.

He stripped off his hunting shirt and ripped the bandage from his head. When he was found it must not be apparent that he had received any care. He waded forward into the cold water, walked off a bench of the river's bed, and struck out. A sudden swirl of the eddy carried him against the wall and he guided himself by treading and edging along the upright logs.

He was past them; was caught up by the current and carried along swiftly down the frontage of the town. The question

now became where, in the black night, was the dock? He felt the water set sharply from shore, and for fear of being carried into the stream began to swim to land, making as little noise as possible. Somewhere, within the palisades, he heard the distinct challenge of a sentry.

Another abrupt swirl of outsetting water hit him in the face and he found himself striving to keep going ahead. It was the devil's own current, he decided, making in a dozen ways at once. This would not do; he could not gain the warf in this fashion. Kicking over, he headed still farther in and at last had the satisfaction of reaching quiet water again.

He heard the quiet ripple of the current against some solid object and, reaching out, came upon the blessed bulk of a pier log. The water flattened him against it and there he rested while recovering his breath. It was well for him that a knot in the log formed his anchor, for, directly above came the abrupt challenge of a protesting voice.

"Eh, Antone, I t'ink you are crazy," it protested. "De current, he make strange noises out dere tonight. Swish, swish, he say. I t'ink we will not get anyt'ing by startin' in de black o' de night."

A voluble stream of French answered this. Would that lazy son of good-for-nothing father never stop grumbling? There was a living to be made; the night was the time for making it. Would he have the whole town knowing where they were bent?

"By gar, I t'ink yes. Best some fallow know w'ere we go. Den w'en a log heet us dere will be help. I t'ink some day we pile up. De night, eet is for sleep."

Also, replied the other, the night was for energetic men of business who knew what they were about. Let sluggards sleep.

A third figure clumped methodically out upon the planking.

"Well, when're you night birds a-goin' to get off?" it demanded. "Won't keep this gate open no longer. If the patrol'd see me I'd have a hell of a time explainin'."

"Be of patience, *mon vieux*. Does not the silver chink pleasantly in your pocket?"

The light of watchman's lantern cast a faint glow upon the water. Cheves flattened the more against the pier log, but he did see, by the same dim rays of light, a ladder nailed against the neighboring pier log. To this was fastened a canoe, and down the ladder descended a Frenchman, then his partner. Cheves swam to the far side of his covert and watched a few lusty strokes carry the canoe into the stream and out of sight. The watchman mumbled a mild curse and turned about to go back across the wharf.

His departure called for swift action. Two strokes brought Cheves to the ladder and he was up on the dock in time to see the lantern shine midway in the gate. He ran forward, his moccasined feet making no noise. Some worry must have delayed the watchman, for he had stopped, back to the river, and was staring at the ground, idly swinging the lantern.

"Too dangerous," he whispered.

An instant later Cheves slipped one lean arm about the man's neck, snatched the lantern away with the other and sent it hurtling through the air. The small flame went out as it fell.

The best the victim could do was thresh the air futilely with his arms. Cheves clung on until he felt the body grow limp; at that signal he loosened his grip, turned away and ran across the road into an alley leading toward the fort. The watchman would be all right in another ten minutes, he guessed. He disliked this pussyfoot manner of fighting, but no other way suited his needs. For the watchman, in fear of revealing his own guilt, would never report the entrance of a man through the gate.

By the time he had reached the fort and sent up a call he had worked out his tale for Hamilton. After a parley with the sentry the guard brought Lieutenant Eltinge to the gate. The latter was visibly upset to see the Virginian again.

"Good Lord," he sputtered. "We thought you were dead—gone the same route our other ranger went."

"I nearly did," replied Cheves. They walked to Eltinge's quarters, where Cheves stripped while Eltinge rummaged his chest and found a tight fit in pants and hunting shirt.

"Get you fresh clothes from the commissary in the morning," he promised. "What happened?" He was all eagerness, pathetic almost in his desire to hear a story of adventure. "Where were you? Fort's been in an uproar ever since you disappeared."

"Let me see Hamilton," returned Cheves. "Right away. I've got important news."

Eltinge very reluctantly led the Virginian to the guard room, from whence he disappeared into the long hallway. He was shortly back. "Broke into a big meeting, but they're on needles to see you. Go in," he requested.

Again Cheves, nerves taut and wary and face schooled to a fair degree of impassivity, approached Hamilton's quarters. The door stood open and they were all watching him as he entered—the governor behind his desk; Girty to one side, his bearded face a mask; two officers of the post; and a great, gross-featured hulk of a man who overflowed the largest chair in the room.

"Well?" said Hamilton impatiently. "What happened to you?"

STANDING there before a battery of half-hostile eyes Cheves told them of his capture in the dark street, of his ride through town, of a complete circuit of the palisades (at that point began the fabrication) of being thrown in a dungeon, of being tortured by a band of men, of finally, on this evening, of being given the water trial. He had strangled and suffered and he was now filled with gallons of pure Detroit River water. But he had not told, and the last thing he remembered was unconsciousness. When he again woke it was to find himself in the dark alleys of Detroit again.

They literally rained questions on him, yet to all he was indefinite and vague. The clout on the head had fuddled his brain, he could not identify the men or the house. His sense of direction was lost by the eternal switching and turning.

"I couldn't locate it now in a thousand years," he protested.

He felt a growing tension in the atmosphere as he proceeded, as if some new and portentious event were approaching, as if each man were weighing some decisive question in his mind. It was Girty, the hostile and implacable Girty who finally leaned forward, face still a mask.

"Carstairs, I'm damned ef you ain't a slippery sort o' flea," he growled. "Ye're too slick fer me. I cain't trip you up; but I tell you this"—and here his face broke into a blaze of suspicion—"you ain't no Englishman, and yez ain't fer us! Ye're a domned, murtherin' traitor, that's what ye be!"

The Virginian thrust his forefinger almost into Girty's face.

"Come out to the square and I'll beat that statement out of you," he raved.

The governor toyed with a quill and looked frankly puzzled. The two officers were like wooden statues. It was the grotesque fellow in the huge chair who opened a cavernous mouth to growl out in a dead bass voice, "Girty, what's your evidence?"

"Ain't got none," snapped the ranger. "But there's been too many things I can't explain. I tell you he ain't fer us, and I'm o' the idee he sh'd be in the guard house. There's somethin' new afoot, I tell you. Captured, be damned!"

At this outright accusation Hamilton came to one of his rare, abrupt decisions. The quill snapped between his fingers.

"That's enough ragging, gentlemen. We'll not get anywhere by this method. Foley," he asked one of the officers, "will you go out and bring in the new messenger from Kaskaskia?"

The word struck Cheves like a blow from a cudgel. Here he was, trapped! He had tarried too long.

The officer left the room forgetting to close the door and the Virginian wished, wistfully, that it were clear and that the way beyond it were clear. But no, he must fight it out, as usual. He heard the governor talking.

"New messenger came in late this evening, very tired, and with two runners from Vincennes. Gave him a bit of time to rest. We'll soon settle this question."

It was but a scant five minutes that the officer was gone, yet it seemed like an hour to Cheves. Girty's eyes, glinting from behind the tangled black beard never left the Virginian's face. Hamilton leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling, seeming bored by it all. The fellow in the large chair shifted his immense paunch from time to time and emitted strange whistling sounds of annoyance from his mouth.

Footsteps sounded in the hall. Cheves, still standing with his face to the governor, heard the officer and his charge enter the room and stop; yet he did not turn, choosing to retain his atttitude of immobility and indifference as long as he might. Hamilton lowered his gaze from the ceiling.

"You were brought in to settle a slight difficulty," he said, addressing the newcomer. "Could you identify the gentleman in front of you?" He motioned for Cheves to turn.

The latter swung on his heel.

The new messenger was Parmenter!

It was a straitened, weather-worn edition of the man with whom Cheves had come down the Ohio. The long chase had drained his physical vigor until there was left only a shell of a body, within which burned a consuming fire. The fire was there, no doubt of that! Cheves saw the

black eyes of the man snap and light with the ineradicable passion of hatred. Then, as suddenly as they had lit, so quickly did a veil of courtesy, a screen of polite recognition conceal the man's real feelings.

Cheves waited for the exposure. His mind covered a hundred details in the moment's silence. What would be Parmenter's concealment if he revealed Cheves? What was Parmenter's real status? And how had he managed to come as the accredited messenger from Kaskaskia, bringing with him two breeds from Vincennes?

"Well, do ye know him?" the irritable voice of Girty broke in.

"Yes," replied Parmenter, "I know him."

"Who is he?" insisted the ranger, the rancor of a long suppressed suspicion rendering him furious. Cheves waited for the final word.

"Messenger from Kaskaskia," announced Parmenter laconically. His sharp eyes sought the features of his fellow Virginian. The taint of mockery found its way to his face.

"What's his name, damn ye!" roared Girty, fast losing control of himself.

Here, thought Cheves, Parmenter must reach his rope's end.

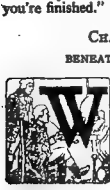
"We are not exactly the best of friends, if you please, though we have known each other under many circumstances," Parmenter returned. "His name is Carstairs."

Utterly amazed, Cheves was attracted by a sound to the rear and turned in time to see Girty shut his mouth with an abrupt, vindictive snap. Hamilton had secured himself another pen and was chewing its point.

"That seems to clarify things, does it not, Girty!" he remarked curtly. "Now will both you gentlemen be kind enough to leave us? Foley, go along and show Parmenter quarters. Come back as soon as you're finished."

CHAPTER VIII

BENEATH THE PAULIN



WITHIN the privacy of quarters Cheves essayed to untangle the twisted skein of events. Where had Parmenter gotten his knowledge of Cheves' pseudonym and rôle? How had he managed to get into the confidence of the Vincennes habitants and rangers? An obvious answer to this last that Parmenter was as capable of masquerading as he. More so, in fact, decided Cheves grimly, since he now languished under a cloud of suspicion while Parmenter was unquestionably accepted at face value.

"Of course!" he said aloud to himself. "I should have known it sooner. He got my name when he followed the same trail from Ouiatanon. So much for that mystery."

And of course Parmenter would lie. He could do nothing else. He would only succeed in compromising himself by trying to expose his fellow Virginian. The same applied to himself, Cheves added grimly. They were both in very much the same boat, their fates irretrievably mingled whether or not they willed it so. Cheves, looking up to the dark ceiling from bed, gave a short, hard laugh.

"Danny boy, we'll have a talk in the morning. 'Twill be to the point, likewise." And with that Cheves made an effort to dismiss the whole thing from his mind and fell asleep.

He did see Parmenter in the morning. The fort square was teeming with life when he left the mess after breakfast. Swarthy coureurs crossed and recrossed the square, now and then a more indolent habitant mixed in with the crowd. A few soldiers performed the detail work of policing. Girty strode toward the gate with a file of men behind him. And out in the center of all this life Cheves met Parmenter. By accident, it seemed; yet it was not accident, for Cheves had been maneuvering some time to get his man in this position. He came up from Parmenter's rear.

"Well, Danny?" he whispered.

Parmenter whirled around, his eyes startled, then he caught hold of himself.

"Thought I might stab you in the back, or somethin' like that, eh?" queried Cheves. "That's your way, not mine. When I get ready 'twill be fairly and squarely."

Parmenter thrust his hands nearer the weapons in his belt. Alertness hardened his eyes.

"What's your idea in followin' me eight hundred miles and tryin' to do me up?" Cheves continued. "Who gave you permission to leave the expedition?"

"You ought to know without bein' told," growled Parmenter. The thought of his grievances began to inflame his morose soul and set his nerves to dancing and jumping with rage. "I've stood all I'm a-goin' to! I ain't makin' no bones about

it either. One way or another I'm after you, and I'll get you. 'Twouldn't do me any good if they found you out here and shot you. I want to do that with my own hands! One way or another, Cheves, I'm a-goin' to hurt you so bad you'll never get over it. Take warnin' now!"

"Thanks for the warnin'," returned Cheves, hard and dry. "Knife and knife it's to be? Very well; I can watch out for myself."

It was a queer thing, these men facing each other with the similitude of friendship in their eyes and the anger of death in their hearts, with a half dozen Britishers looking on, unaware of the significance of the tableau.

"Let me say this," remarked Cheves. "I've held off many times from hurtin' you when cause was given me. You're from Virginia and so am I. But I can't disregard it any longer. It's your life or mine, and I've work to do. Next time we fight I shall kill you."

The coldness and deliberate finality of his tone seemed to quench, in a measure, the other's anger. Bereft of that, Parmenter's face seemed only thoroughly weak and vicious, capable of any crime.

"One thing more," continued Cheves. "You'll be questioned about Kaskaskia by Hamilton. Tell him the story I did." And he gave, in a brief phrase or two the message he had given the governor. "Best to hang together on that much of it," he added, "or neither of us will accomplish our designs. Both be shot for nothin', then." And without further ado he walked off.

He saw Eltinge wave a hand from the guard room and a moment later the lieutenant had come up.

"Let's take a turn about the parade," he suggested. "Must have fresh air and exercise. I'd give a hundred pounds if I might go north with the next fur brigade. It's a silly state of affairs, is it not, when a man comes seven thousand miles to have a bit of adventure, and then finds himself in a job like that of a clerk in a London counting house!

THEY went through the gate. It was another warm day in Detroit town; the sun fell across the hard packed earth of the parade ground and blended its warmth with the breeze coming off the river. A scattering of blanketed Indians were sitting against the Fort wall, wrapped to the ears. A larger number of them than he had previously seen, Cheves observed. Eltinge offered a cigar to Cheves and himself lit another.

"Look at me," said the lieutenant, with ill-concealed bitterness. "I might as well be a London hack driver for all the West and North I've seen. King and duty! King and duty! Damme, I've had my share of king and duty! I want active service! Now you," he said, taking a vigorous pull on the cigar, "are seeing things. I'd give five hundred pounds to be in your boots right now. More than that. Give all I had to have come down the Ohio and up the Wabash. Man! Think of it!"

It was a rather amazing outburst for a phlegmatic Englishman to make, Cheves thought. Now, *he* would give nearly anything he possessed to be out of his boots and into those of Eltinge—for the brief time in which he might come closer to the heart of the fort and learn a certain indispensable secret which was all that held him back. He needed desperately to get that secret and clear out. No telling when the real Kaskaskia man might turn up.

"University man, with a backwoods training! Lord, what a life you're having." Eltinge began afresh. "Me, a-rusting in this infernal village. And now Hamilton's figuring on a fresh expedition south and I can't go along."

Cheves came to a sudden alert attention, and flicked the ashes from the cigar.

"No fun in a scalping expedition," he said casually. "That's bloody work. If he were going south to Vincennes with regulars it would be different."

"That's what it's to be. Girty and Hamilton and Dejean had a long powwow over it last night. Tonight they're having another. Isn't just decided yet. But the governor has his heart set on it."

Dejean! Ralston's contemptuous, bitter description of the man occurred to Cheves. Dejean, then, was the fat, gross figure in the large chair. So they contemplated an expedition southward toward Clark? Here was the secret for which he had tarried so long! But he must find more about it.

"Of course," he said in an off-hand manner, "it will be slow and cumbersome with regular troops. It will have to be a small detachment if they expect to make time."

"It will be," returned Eltinge confidently. "Why, Carstairs, we've hardly enough men to keep this garrison. A good

strong force of Americans coming up some night could nearly wipe us out. It's ticklish to think of. And now they want to weaken us further by taking a wild chase down the Wabash to the Illinois country. Let 'em take care of themselves down there. Detroit's the queen of the Northwest, just as Cadillac said it was, sixty years ago. Lose Detroit and we lose the whole country. Yet I'd give anything to go along!"

"Girty ought to be due to go to the border settlements pretty soon with a war party," Cheves offered as a mild comment, trying another tack. "Time they were sending some old-hand ranger out. We don't know what's taking place east of the Scioto any more."

"You know," and the young lieutenant said this in a very hesitating way, "I am not wholly in favor of letting Indians help us fight our quarrels. It isn't exactly in the bood of Englishmen to fight that fashion."

They had made their detour and were back within the gate again.

"Duty once more," continued Eltinge bitterly. "Garrison duty!"

"Your turn will come," said Cheves, trying to console him. With that they parted, the lieutenant headed for the guard room.

And so will mine, Cheves thought, going back through the gate. So tonight they were to hold a council in the governor's room again? Through some means he must hear what they had to say. Time was getting short, and the strands of inevitable exposure seemed to clutter tighter about him. Clark, eight hundred miles away, waited to hear his report.

For the best part of the afternoon he wandered around the village and sat on a stringer of King's Wharf watching the canoes furrow up and down the river. There was in him a great desire to see Katherine Ralston.

IGHT, and the hurried forms of men sliding through the door of the guard room, heading for the council chamber. Cheves, loafing in a dark corner of the fort, saw them enter, one by one, counting them until he had reached six. After that no more went through. Now, if he could get past the guard room he felt secure in his concealment; for the hall leading to the governor's room opened out at intervals into storerooms, and it so happened that the door of the council chamber abutted upon just such a storeroom. Bales of goods, trading trinkets, and other items of barter were stored there. It would be no great job to find concealment, once he reached the place.

He crept along the wall, in the shadows, toward the entrance to the guard room. A sentry paused on the corner bastion twenty feet above, but did not see him. A door opened from officers' quarters and a pale dim candle light seeped out as a man emerged, buttoned a jacket and closed the door behind him. Cheves flattened against the wall and kept still. The officer cut across the court toward the guard room; the door opened and another similar thin wave of light flickered. The officer hesitated on the threshold. Cheves was only a scant thirty feet from him.

"Hey, O'Malley," called the officer softly. "Come out and have a bit of fresh air. It's my turn now, but I'm cursed if I want to go in there yet; let's walk a bit. I've a bottle of Medford rum that might int'rest you."

The offer drew the officer of guard out into the night, leaving the guard room door open. This was the thrice golden opportunity for which Cheves looked. He ran softly forward, crossed the threshold, and went swiftly through the room, got into the hallway, and closed the inner door behind him.

He went perhaps twenty feet down the dark passageway before striking another door, opened and closed it behind him and continued on, being now in a sudden bayou of the hall wherein were barrels of lead shot from the Illinois country and the mines of the Wisconsin. He slid through another door and came at last to the room of supplies, beyond which was the governor's chamber. It was perfectly black; that was protection for him. He got closer to the door, beneath which streamed a thin line of light, and through which came the undertone of speech; heavy, irritated, passionate speech. Girty talking again!

But Cheves had yet to provide safety for himself. He crept back from the door and felt about with hands and feet, coming in contact with a heavy, tarred canvas paulin such as were used to cover canoe loads in wet weather. It was jammed between other bales of goods. By much fumbling labor he straightened it in such a fashion that he might crawl under, still between the bales. It was protection of a sort. Then he crept back to the door.

The voice now audible was that of Dejean; Cheves recognized the heavy, dull tones.

"—evidence not good enough, Girty," he was saying. "I'd line him up against the wall and shoot him if we had the least scrap of evidence. There is none."

"Gentlemen, keep to the topic." It was the impatient voice of Hamilton. "Can we spare that many soldiers from our garrison to strengthen the Southern forts?"

"I say no," Dejean voted. "We can't weaken Detroit. What's the danger in the South? I've heard of none. Let them fend for themselves. No great damage done if they fall from Indian attacks. Detroit must be kept strong. Why, a force of a hundred Americans or four or five hundred savages could wipe us off the map if they had the chance of surprise and weak defense! We're criminally weak! Damn the commandant at Montreal that he can't send us another company!"

"Hark!" said Girty.

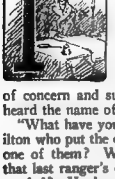
Cheves caught the shuffle of a foot. He sprang for the paulin and got beneath it. The next moment the door was jerked open and light flooded out, reaching vaguely back to the pile of bales. Cheves guessed, rather than saw, that Girty stood peering across the threshold.

"Oh, come back here," growled Dejean.

After a bit the door closed. Cheves waited another good ten minutes before venturing back to his post.

"Weakness it may be, but I'm responsible for the whole country," Hamilton was arguing. "Detroit's in no danger." His voice fell to calmer tones and Cheves lost a part of it. Then it rose again. "Detroit's in no danger. South forts abominably weak."

A silence, then argument, then rebuttal.



IT WAS a long while before he could again catch the threads of conversation; when he did it was to note a new and strangely familiar voice. Then a quick, near paralyzing shock of concern and surprise struck him as he heard the name of Ralston mentioned.

"What have you found?" It was Hamilton who put the question. "Isn't Ralston one of them? Wasn't he responsible for that last ranger's disappearance? Isn't he a rebel? You've been working with them for two months now and haven't given me a jot of information. Haven't you found anything?"

"I haven't found anything yet, sir." It was only by the questioning silence of the room that Cheves was able to hear the slow, cold, deliberate answer. "No cause for you to take them in. No proof of anything whatsoever. They've tended to their business."

And at that point Cheves recognized the voice as belonging to John Harkness, the lieutenant and right hand man of Colonel Ralston.

"Must be that girl. She's been influencing you. Damned strange about that family! That's why I gave you the job this spring. And you haven't found a thing. It's hardly believable."

"Didn't I manage to put your fingers on the rest of the malcontents? Haven't we got them nearly all weeded out? Haven't I done good work, sir?" The cold voice rose to a metallic, angry pitch.

"Yes," replied the governor. "You've done such a good work that this singularly ineffectiveness of yours recently doesn't seem right. And morally certain the Ralstons are the most dangerous enemies we've got in Detroit."

"I have found nothing sir," replied Harkness obstinately. "But I've got my eyes on another man, within this fort. Give me three days and I shall turn him over to you."

"Who is he?"

"I beg not to be asked that until I can bring him to you with the proof."

And again the talk fell to a long jumble of questions and answers, and Cheves felt that the conference was drawing to a close. It was just as well. He had heard all he could assimilate. This revelation of the duplicity of Harkness left his mind racing along a new path. Harkness, then, was a British intelligence officer; and as such had been responsible for the Americans deported and executed around Detroit town.

Yet why had he lied thus to his commandant, reporting that he knew of no subversive act on the part of the Ralstons, when he was the full confidant of all of the colonel's plans? In the mind of Cheves there was a swift answer to this. The Lord bless Katherine Ralston! She had turned a British officer off the straight path of his duty. Hamilton had made a shrewder surmise than he knew.

A general stir and scraping of chairs forced Cheves back beneath the paulin. The doors opened and the officers marched out one by one, retreating down the hall to the guard room. Again Cheves took

a swift and dangerous chance. Crawling out from concealment he followed the last man at the interval of a room's length. The gloom of the passageway made this possible. When he came to the guard room both inner and outer doors stood open, and the chamber itself was empty. He saw, through the vista thus formed, the small group disappear in the direction of officers' quarters, swallowed up in the night. He stepped into the guard room, closed the inner door behind him and walked slowly out into the court, to come face to face with the lieutenant of the guard who advanced out of the night.

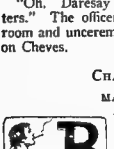
The latter appeared a bit flustered, as though caught off his post.

"Pardon," said Cheves, "I came by here thinking to find Lieutenant Eltinge."

"Oh. Daresay you'll find him in quarters." The officer got within the guard-room and unceremoniously closed the door on Cheves.

Chapter IX

MAELSTROM



BUT the lieutenant was not in quarters, which was just as well; for Cheves had a great amount of thinking to do and wanted nothing so much as time and solitude. He helped himself to one of Eltinge's cigars and settled in a camp chair.

His mission in Detroit was ended. He had secured the essential knowledge that a company of men were being despatched south. Likewise, he had secured a hundred other tag ends of information for which Clark thirsted. It had been an unusually successful trip and there was no further reason for postponing departure.

No reason? Frankness asserted itself. There were Katherine Ralston and her father, two very good reasons for tarrying. These people lived on the rim of a crater, sheltered only by the efforts of a man who had betrayed his duty. And Harkness, to bolster up his difficult position had dangled the prospects of another victim before Hamilton's covetous eyes. That victim, Cheves guessed, was Cheves.

Yet how could Harkness incriminate him without involving the Ralstons? He did not see. A recollection of the hard-bitten face and the direct, unfriendly eyes of the Englishman left him with the conviction that here was a man to deal with. Very dangerous; and with unknown sources of power in reserve. The fact that he now played a double game made him only the more dangerous. He was no callow youth, but a desperate, grown soldier, playing the grimmest rôle of all.

There was Parmenter to contend with. There was Girty sulking about, waiting only for the slightest mis-step. Above all, the real messenger from Kaskaskia must shortly be on his way. That meant inevitable exposure. In all, the situation had become too badly tangled for one man to forecast.

The promptings of his conscience impelled him to pick up the pistol and holster lying on the cot and start immediately southward; an inner feeling of loyalty, mingled with some other emotion he did not care to analyze, rose to combat the first impulse. And there he sat, undecided and distressed, trying not to think of the dismal future for the Ralstons which was, to him, only inevitable.

He rose and went out, and the fresh air made him feel better. After all, was it not his duty to remain and see the war council? Some new factor might develop which would be highly important for Clark to know. Ah, there was a solution!

He recognized immediately that it was but a subterfuge; he sought how to deceive himself. This genuinely distressed him.

The tramp of a sentry, twenty feet above, echoed evenly down. The night was serene, the sky luminous with stars, and a moon riding high behind a passing net of clouds. He had come by the closed main gate, drawing full on the fragrant remnant of the Virginia cigar, the tip of which glowed in the night. Turning a corner, he started down the north side of the court, locked in the struggle which has oppressed men since the beginning of time. It wore on him worse than the combined hardships of his journey.

The roar of a pistol filled the court and thundered around the stockade; the bullet thudded into a nearby log, not a foot from Cheves' head. It was as if a breath of air had been expelled against his face. He jerked back and stood on tiptoe; at the same time he heard the crash of the sentry's musket changing positions from shoulder to charge.

"Who's there?" bawled the guard from the bastion top.

That bullet had come from officers' quarters, Cheves swiftly noted. By chance his head had been turned that way and he had seen the red finger of flame. It was from

the room next to his own, he thought. The door of the guard room jerked open and the lieutenant ran out; at the same time men popped from quarters. Cheves, eyes still riveted on the point from which the bullet had come, saw a door open and a man slip out and mingle with the other approaching figures.

"What's up?" called the lieutenant to the sentry.

"A shot, sir; man in the court alone."

"What's the matter?" the officer called, seeing Cheves.

"It's nothin'," returned Cheves laconically. "Probably someone cleaning his gun after dark. No damage. Just a bit more lead in the stockade."

"Very strange. Did you notice the direction it came from."

"Not at all. Was just goin' along with me head in the air, thinkin' of other things. It's nothin' at all, Lieutenant." He scanned the circle and found, as he expected, Parmenter. The moon slid hastily out to a clearer sky and Cheves got a better view of his fellow Virginian. The face was drawn to an expression of veiled unconcern. But the restless, bitter eyes! They were the sole testimony Cheves asked. He turned away from the small group. "It's nothin'," he repeated with impatience. "Have none of you heard a pistol shot before?"

He made for quarters and once there got quickly to bed. The struggle had been briefly terminated. He would stay now.

E WOKE to a day of sullen and fitful contrasts; a gathering haze blanketed the town and the wind, toward midmorning, died away, leaving a murky sun and a torrid fog to torture and bake the inhabitants. It was insufferable within the fort; even the stolid Indians, now cluttering up the court, suffered visibly, sweat rolling down daubed faces. Yet they clung to their dignity and suffered rather than cast the swathing blankets from their bodies. Dressed for ceremony in a white man's fort, they must so remain.

Cheves endured it as long as he could, then left the fort and started for the river. There, at least, he would find cool water. He crossed the parade and was almost suffocated by the waves of heat reflected from the packed earth. It made his head swim and he was glad to gain the partial protection of a narrow alley. A short way down, the cool interior of a wine shop drew him in; it was some relief. He ordered a glass of port and sipped it in grateful leisure. On the point of going and continuing his journey river-ward he saw Eltinge, and motioned for him to enter.

"Gad, this is insufferable!" panted the lieutenant, well nigh dazed. "Nothing like it since I've been here. We're due for a heat storm soon enough. Sooner the better. I'm near done for." He wiped a vagrant trickle of sweat from his forehead.

"I'm headed for the river," vouchsafed Cheves. "Come along. We'll have some comfort there."

The girl came up, but Eltinge shook his head.

"*Non, merci;* no liquor on a day like this. To the river? Not a bad idea. Probably find most of the town there. Well, let's go. I've got to be back at three o'clock. My turn of guard again. I hope the storm breaks by then!"

They passed out and continued down the alley. At the first intersection they came upon an old Frenchman, bent and rickety, hobbling along; his mouth hung wide open and fear was visibly stamped on his wrinkled face.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he gasped as they went by him, and immediately thereafter clapped a hand to his heart.

A woman ran down the street, got hold of the fellow's hand and led him back to a house.

"Be somebody dead before this is over," panted Eltinge. "Never a thing like it before, in my time."

Even then, as Cheves surveyed the eastern sky line, he saw a black mass of clouds forming up.

"Won't be long," he said, and was aware of a tension on his body; he had come near to shouting that last phrase and was vaguely surprised at himself.

Eltinge gave him a curious glance. A small group of men were bunched up at the next intersection, and seemed to be busy over a prostrate form in the roadway.

"Hello," said Eltinge. "Somebody's gone under. I knew it."

He turned toward the group, and Cheves followed. The Frenchmen parted as the Englishmen came up, revealing Danny Parmenter kneeling in the center. Pillowed on his thigh was the white, drawn face of Colonel Ralston.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Eltinge, assuming authority.

Parmenter looked up and saw them; a

brief flicker of excitement animated his face as he recognized Cheves.

"Old gentleman here went under to the heat," he responded. "Just happened along as he toppled over."

"I thought so," said Eltinge.

Cheves nodded impassively. "It would be wise to get the man out of the sun," he offered in a noncommittal manner. "Come on, Eltinge, let's get to the river before we melt."

Parmenter shot him another quick, triumphant glance and turned back to his charge. Willing Frenchmen gave him aid and they picked up the colonel and headed for the nearest wine shop.

"Cold-blooded chap, aren't you?" said Eltinge in a kind of admiration. "Life doesn't seem worth a plugged ha'penny to you rangers."

"Ain't time to worry about it," responded the Virginian. "Trouble enough to keep your own skin." Internally he boiled.

Here was an unfortunate circumstance! Parmenter would know soon enough of the Ralston residence. Ah, there was an opportunity for injury, and Parmenter would see it in a flash! Trust his diabolic treachery. Why hadn't he killed the man before and saved all this untold accumulation of animus and certain misfortune? If harm came to the Ralstons—then Parmenter should pay!

They went through the gate and walked out upon the puncheons of King's Wharf. No townspeople there; they had gone to the beaches on both sides of the stockade, where they might swim.

"Just seeing water makes me feel better," remarked Eltinge. "Gad, I never want to be as hot as this again."

"Just as bad as this in the Illinois country sometimes," offered Cheves, leading the way to a seat on a stringer, within the small shade afforded by the wall. "When you have to cut through the prairie covered with hemp and grape it's pretty bad. Heat stays in the tangle and a man swelters till he's like raw beefsteak."

"That's different. You're out doing something; here you just sit passive. Might as well be a huckster in Whitechapel."

The black cloud soared out of the eastward at a tremendous pace. A half hour ago it had been only a suggestion. Now its ragged edges swept the sky. Far off came the tremor and report of thunder.

"Storm's about due," said Eltinge, twisting his neck in acute misery. "There's the wind."

The sun was blotted out in the space of a minute; the mass rushed on, first showing the gray-shot edges; then appeared the solid opaque center. A quick wind struck them. In five minutes it grew perceptibly cooler. Cheves saw the people on the beaches come out of the water and begin a general hurried movement toward town. Came a crash and rumble of thunder, and the reverberating roll of the echo. A strong gust of wind hit them, wind cold enough to be comfortable.

"I think we'd beter go back," said Eltinge, a trace of nervousness in his voice. "I'm not used to this. We'll be rained on shortly."

"'Twill be worse than that," assented Cheves. They got up and returned through the gate.

It was but midafternoon, yet from the darkness it might have been twilight. The whole sky was filled with black, twisting clouds. A patter of rain struck the dusty alley.

"Here she comes!"

ROOT-LIKE flame of lightning flashed and disappeared; came the roar and tumult of the ensuing thunder crash, rolling and booming like the cataclysmic fall of mountains. The wind sharpened and the rain came in larger drops. The two men hurried up the alley, being met and passed by sober faced habitants. One man shouted out a phrase of unintelligible French to them from an open door, then slammed it behind him. A candle light appeared through a window and was, the next moment, snuffed out.

They crossed the parade in driving rain and went through the gate as a huge clap of thunder shook the earth and deafened their hearing. It was black night.

The storm took on a deeper, more sinister note as the two men gained the shelter of their room.

Eltinge tarried only long enough to put on a dry tunic and buckle on a pistol.

"My turn at guard," he said, and went out the door, leaving Cheves alone.

The things that Fate accomplished! What was he to do in the face of this last dilemma, Cheves thought rapidly. By this time, in all likelihood, Danny Parmenter had wormed his insinuating way into the graces of the Ralstons. Oh, why hadn't he told the whole story of the man's defection to them? He supposed that wouldn't have been possible; he could not have done

it and still kept his self respect. Yet how easier it would have made his own position here in a hostile land. Now he must rack his brains and forestall the man's trickery, for Parmenter had sworn to hurt him until he would die of the pain. Well, here was the chance; Parmenter confiding to the Ralstons, duping them under the guise of friendship and old acquaintance, weaving his own designs into their fears.

How was he to prevent this?

Better to have shot the man down in cold blood than to imagine all the injury he could do now. Cheves grew angrier and more gloomy. The tremendous onslaught of the storm outside, the crash and roll of the thunder, the drive of the rain against the door, the shriek of the wind, the whole fierce and resentful tempo seemed to communicate its surge and animus to him. He got up and paced across the small quarters, unable to stem the slowly rising rage. It was a cold, implacable rage such as he had experienced but once before in his life, and that on the occasion of a particularly bloody border massacre. He had gone into the woods, at the head of an avenging Kentucky company, with just such a mood.

Of a sudden he reached out for a belt and pistol, strapped it around him; then struggled into a great coat. Time had come to use ball and shot. Here, at last, one strand of the tangled skein must be cut in twain. And as he put on a cape and started for the door, a sinister chill of apprehension invaded him. Things went wrongly, he knew, at the Ralston place.

He did not open the door. It was pushed wide before him under the impetus of a newcomer's hand and the drive of the storm which streaked across the small room snuffed out the candle.

"Pardon," said a cold voice. "Didn't mean to create such a disturbance.

The door closed and Cheves fumbled to relight the candle. When once again it guttered and flared, illuminating the room, the Virginian turned to identify this sudden visitor. It was John Harkness who leaned against the door, one hand to the knob. Bundled up as the Englishman was, Cheves made out only the slit of the thin, restrained mouth, the arrogant nose, and the harsh eyes.

"Take a chair," said Cheves.

Harkness shook his head and stared at the Virginian. Internal excitement of some sort began to work at his face.

"What can I do for you?" asked Cheves, impatience cropping up. He had work to do.

"Going out?"

"I thought to." Perhaps this man had come upon an errand of capture. Cheves hunched his body to loosen the great coat and render the pistol and holster more accessible.

Harkness noted this movement and shook his head. At the same time he unbuttoned his coat to reveal an identical service weapon.

"That's what I've come for," he said, with a significant stab of a forefinger.

"I don't understand," said Cheves.

"You and I—got to settle this—out of court." The words came in a sketchy phrase or two, lacking coherence. Harkness seemed to realize it, and suddenly jerked up his head. "Here," he began afresh, "there's no use in beating around the bush. You and I've got to fight this out. One man goes under. You understand?"

"Only a part of it."

"I'll tell you more, then. Last night I turned around to look back when I got out of the conference. Was half-way across the court when I looked. Saw you coming out of the guard room. You overheard that conference."

Cheves nodded. Little good to deny it. Moreover, this man had some other plan up his sleeve.

"Well," said Harkness, raising his chin to a higher, more stubborn level. "You know the part I play then." Here bitterness asserted itself. "I guess you might call me a traitor, or a renegade. But you know the reason!"

Cheves inclined his head. Katherine Ralston!

"A soldier has no right to fall in love," continued Harkness. "Damn it all, a high-bred woman has no right in this country! What was I to do? She doesn't stand the ghost of a show if her father is discovered. I've done the best I could, by both sides. Now you come and, damn your soul, she likes you! Oh, I saw that. Well, I've not perjured myself and eaten dirt, and lost my self respect just to have you step in. I've done these things for a certain reward, and I shall have it! I'm desperate now. You'll have to fight me. One of us goes under!"

Cheves straightened. Here was a plain and simple call to duel. He bowed ceremoniously.

"I'm at your service, sir, at any time," he replied courteously.

"Now!" Harkness closed his mouth with a snap. "We'll have it out now, while

all this infernal racket is going on. I warn you, I'm a dead shot, and I don't mean you shall cheat me."

"I have always been able to care for myself," Cheves observed, buttoning his coat. "Will you lead the way?"

THEY went out. The dead-black center of the storm clouds had passed over, but the light was grime-colored and the rain was blinding. The thunder boomed and rolled; now and then a dart of lightning streaked across the heavens and ended in a fury of noise that stunned the earth. Harkness led the way through a corridor of the fort, traversed the mess hall by several storerooms, and stopped at the end of a blind passageway. Here was a small and heavily bolted door. Harkness shot back the draws and opened the barrier. It led out behind the fort, beyond the stockade, on the far and wooded side of the town.

"One man only comes back through here," said Harkness, on the threshold. He was forced to raise his voice to a higher pitch. "Things—well enough—you hadn't stepped in! Ralstons weren't doing any damage. Did my duty. Won't put my head in a noose to be cheated!"

"It's quite a natural thought," observed Cheves. "I was on the verge of going out to do myself a little justice when you stepped in."

They advanced toward a grove of trees, with the wind and the rain driving them along. A racketing clap of thunder shivered the ground. Not far off was the crash of falling limbs.

"Lightning strikes close," said Cheves. But the wind snatched the words from his mouth and his companion, hearing only a faint sound of the voice, turned to catch what had been said.

Cheves shook his head; they went on. Funny, the Virginian mused, he could not find it in his heart to be angry at his challenger. The way of life; a man got into positions from which he could not extricate himself by diplomacy. The only alternative then was to close the mind and the heart and fight it out. And Harkness, become ensnared in the tangle of a double rôle, had, soldier-like, elected to cut the mess squarely and cleanly in twain, falling back at last upon the simplest code he knew. Cheves admired him for this.

Came a diminution of the storm and Cheves was aware that they had penetrated to the heart of a grove of oak, the branches of which were fending off in part the attacks of the storm.

"Remember, I'm a dead shot," Harkness warned, facing about. "Want to give you an even chance, but I'm going to kill you. Take your choice of positions."

The light, such as it was, broke slantwise through an opening of the oaks and fell on the north side of the glade. Cheves, by a sweep of the hand, elected the south side. It forced Harkness to stand in the small bit of light, thus being more exposed, while Cheves stood in comparative darkness and was the harder to see.

"Leave top coats on; pistols beneath them to keep powder dry," said Harkness, reciting the conditions of the duel. "I'll walk over there, turn and face you. When I turn begin to count three, like this." He spaced three counts. "Fire when you've pronounced three. "Is that satisfactory?"

Cheves nodded, walked to the spot of his choice and turned.

"I'll wait here for you," he said.

Harkness tarried, seeming to have lost for the moment his usual decisive manner.

"Damn it man, you've forced this! No other way!"

"I am not complaining."

"Can't be both of us. One has to get out of the way. I'll leave your body here. Some wood gatherer will pick it up in a day or so."

Cheves drew the gun from its holster and held it beneath his coat. Lacking free play, he unbuttoned the top of the garment.

"I'm ready," said he.

"You're not afraid," Harkness remarked, staring at the Virginian a moment with compressed lips. He walked a step, exclaimed, "Ready," and began a methodical advance toward his chosen place.

A shaft of lightning flashed across the sky and clearly revealed the scene; the earth jarred and the world went black, leaving Cheves half blinded from the glare. A dozen streaks of red danced before his eyes. Nerves taut, he peered ahead and saw the dim form of Harkness halt, back turned. The Virginian got a firmer grip on his gun and waited.

"Glare caught him, too," he thought. Then the Englishman swung, slow and careful, on his heel. Cheves saw his face lift in signal, the white standing out against the surrounding black. At that the Virginian began to count, dragging each syllable to create the proper pause.

He had not uttered "three" when the

world rocked again and a larger, more blinding flash came and went, playing havoc with his vision.

"Three!" he shouted—and held his fire.

He could not see, and he would not waste his shot. Yet the etiquette of the situation demanded that he stand there, immovable, and take the other's fire.

Across the space came, after what seemed a life-long passage of time, a shout.

"I can't see!"

In answer Cheves returned a similar cry.

When at last his pupils began to distinguish objects on the far side of the glade he noted that Harkness had folded his arms and was showing his back. A surge of admiration invaded Cheves. The man had plenty of courage! He waited until clearer eyed and sent over a second shout. At this Harkness wheeled and again jerked up his head. Again Cheves began the slow, monotonous count. At "three!" he raised the pistol from its security, extended it, and took up the trigger's slack. He saw that Harkness came up slower, and he witheld final pressure until the man's gun was nearly horizontal. Then he fired.

He saw the flame from the answering gun, heard the echo of the answering shot, but felt no impact of bullet. His mind, coolly detached, seeming remote from excitement, decided that he had not been hit, and in an impersonal way he was glad it had been decided. Lifting back the flap of his coat he replaced the pistol and advanced across the glade.

Harkness had fallen; and now struggled to remain up on one elbow. But he was too far gone; the elbow slipped, and his head fell to the ground. The Virginian drew out a handkerchief.

"Where?" he asked.

Harkness stabbed a futile finger at his chest. Cheves started to open the tunic but was stopped by a sudden access of strength from the other man.

"Get away," he growled. A species of surprise flitted across his face. The quick energy ebbed away. "I'm done up. Get away."

When next the Virginian thrust his hand across the stained chest the heart had stopped its labor. Cheves rose, retraced the way through the glade and came upon the rear door. Getting within the fort once again he shot the bolts and half ran down the passageway, wanting only to be out of this angle of the fort unwitnessed.

It seemed that the whole military population had gathered in the square, not under arms nor standing any formation, but milling and shifting from place to place, congregating into small groups, breaking up, and reforming. A high excitement was stamped on each face. Cheves halted on the edge of the crowd and sought to catch the tag ends of conversation that came up to him on the wind.

"Come down the Ohio, crossed seventy-five miles of Illinois prairie land, and surprised Rocheblave after dark. Kaskaskia's fallen!"

Cheves waited to hear no more. The thing feared had come to pass. Clark had struck, and the real messenger from Kaskaskia was come. Now he must get out.

His first thought was of the rear door. Turning, he strode toward the entrance to the mess room, whence he had just come.

An officer bumped sharp against him and stared into his face, to break into a quick cry. "Eh, Carstairs? There you are! Stop!"

He had caught the Virginian on the shoulder. Cheves tore loose and broke into a run, but it seemed a dozen men sprang up on the instant. The shout went up, "Here's the spy!" and was born on fifty tongues at once. Confusion and riot! With the whole garrison pressing toward him. Five feet to the mess room door! If he could only make it and stem the rush for a moment. He cast one swift glance behind and saw the rage-swollen face of Girty glaring at him. Then he turned and knocked the only remaining man out of his path with the butt of his gun, leaping ahead. No time for parley, nor subterfuge! Get on! Fight it out!

A blow on the head felled him, senseless, to the hard earth of the court.

Chapter X

THE BENEFIT OF LEARNING

THE fort prison, Cheves had learned earlier, was below ground; being truly a foul, dank, and oppressive kind of residence. This was the description of Eltinge.

"You know," he once confided to Eltinge, "there's a lot of inhumanity in the world, and I'm sorry to see so much of it on the English side of the fence. That prison now; it's abominable."

And here it was that Cheves found himself.

A chilly draught of air swept diagonally across it, from one unseen vent to another. It was this draught, added to a

moist yet hard earth which brought him back to reality, aching of head, sore of limb. Yet the bludgeon-stroke had been more stunning than dangerous; he felt gingerly over his face and hair and found no blood. The old cut held fast under the strain; the sum total of this last accident was a huge, pounding pain over the eyes.

Acute discomfort brought him to his feet. There was one small beam of smudgy light coming from a corner grating, high up. It was the sort of window built not to admit light, but to tantalize some light-hungry prisoner, and, from appearances, it was built level with the surface of the ground. The current of air did not come from that direction, so evidently there were other openings of a kind in this dreary dungeon. Well, he might find some more comfortable spot to rest than here in the center of this black pit. He began a slow tour forward.

His arm, stretched ahead to fend against accidents, struck a log wall, wet to the touch. At another point his fingers came in contact with a small, slimy body; it sent an unpleasant shock through him. Probably a snail. It were well that no illuminating light revealed the whole nastiness of this place! His foot struck softer material; reaching down with inquisitive fingers he felt a thick, wet fabric which parted under the stress of a gentle pull. Once, he decided, it had been a blanket.

By now he had come to the unknown source of air. As far as he could determine it was simply a small tunnel, entering at the bottom of the prison area and going back and upward to the surface. It was too small, his foot determined, for any effort at escape. Continuing on, he arrived beneath the window, some ten feet above his head. His exploring fingers, seeking everywhere, found small gouged niches in the logs, ascending at intervals of a foot. Some poor lost soul previously jailed had tried to attain freedom! The Virginian thrust a toe in a lower aperture and found a finger hold farther up. A small excitement stirred in him and gave zest to the discovery. A bare chance, here, for escape. His groping fingers found a higher niche, and he drew himself up.

He had climbed four feet perhaps, each succeeding hole becoming smaller and more untenable, when his hand found only the unbroken surface of a log. This, then, was the end of the attempt at freedom; the man had given out. Poor devil! Doubtless gone under, and now an unknown bit of wreckage in an unknown grave. The Virginian let himself down, reluctantly, and continued his explorations.

Opposite the window the log wall left off to admit a heavy, spiked and bolted door; solid save for a small aperture some six inches square. Some blacksmith had spent many laborous hours in fashioning that impregnable barrier. Well, nothing to do save seek the least uncomfortable spot and play 'possum.

As far as he could determine the foot of the door was as good a place as any; so there he sat and stared into the dark.

He had not rested five minutes before coming to a characteristic and irrevocable decision: he would again stake his future on one last desperate fling of chance. As events now stood he saw but one future, that of being lined up against the outer wall of the fort and shot. It seemed inevitable. If such were the outlook, no possible risk he might take could be either rash or wholly past hope. Born and bred to the idea of loyalty, he believed in the fulfillment of whatever mission entrusted him. Here, at the low ebb of personal fortune, he did not so much chose the idea of overpowering the jailer from a hasty temperament as from the hard shove of his clear, ruthless logic He had failed of escape, and he carried a precious knowledge that his chief needed. Now he must atone for that failure.

The light gradually merged with the inner shadows until at last there was no light. At some point in the evening he slept. The hard, damp ground caused his slumber to be fitful; once a rat crawled its lethargic way across his hand, and again the current of air momentarily shifted its course and brought him a fresher stench. But his final wakening was due to a steady advance of footsteps down the hall, and the scrape of a key in the prison door. On the instant he had sprung up, fully alive, mind racing over the coming struggle. A quick blow on the temple, or a swift arm about the throat; after that it would not be so difficult to find his way down the passage to the small rear door of the fort. His body curved and his muscles became hard, predatory cords. The door swung back. An arm thrust through a smoking lantern; behind it Cheves saw the troubled face of Lieutenant Eltinge. Cheves relaxed, and his hands fell to his sides.

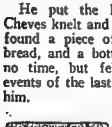
"Carstairs," called Eltinge, softly.

"Here."

"Gad, but this is a foul place to put a white man," grumbled the officer. "Inhuman!" He supported a bundle in one

hand. This he gave to Cheves, stepped within the prison vault, and closed the heavy door behind him. "Something to eat there," he said. "Hurry—get after it!"

He put the lantern on the ground. Cheves knelt and unwrapped the cloth and found a piece of meat, a loaf of black bread, and a bottle of wine. He wasted no time, but fell immediately to. The events of the last few hours had famished him.



THE lieutenant looked on, clucked his tongue, sighed; and ended by striding back and forth, from the lantern's light to the farther gloom, and back again; to cast troubled glances at the Virginian; to sigh and resume the march. Once he forced the door back and looked down the passage. He watched the Virginian swallow the last of the wine, with mingled sadness and admiration on his fair, boyish face. It was easy to see that he fought with tempting devils and that the older man came near supplying the image of a resourceful, fearless Western god in his young, adventure-craving heart.

"You'll be lined up and shot!" he blurted out finally. "Lined up and shot like a common criminal!"

Cheves silently cursed him for entering the vault out of friendliness. How could he go on with his plan when a man approached him on honor?

"Shot like an ordinary criminal! Isn't as if you were an illiterate ranger; there's enough of them to spare. But a university man! Shot! Oh, that's impossible! We can't afford to do that. Better kill a hundred ordinary fellows!"

Eltinge spoke with the intense loyalty of class, mingled with a bitterness. Here was the major problem of his young life. Here at last he had come to grips with a stern, stark phase of the primitive and warring West. Manfully he fought through to his conclusions.

"Why didn't you leave before? Why did you wait? 'Twas a blunder. Your partner got away," he demanded.

So Parmenter had slipped out. Once again a chill of apprehension and foreboding thrust its spidery fingers up Cheves' back. Something had gone wrong at the Ralston place!

"You'll not do us any hurt by escaping," Eltinge went on. "You Americans will never get Detroit. It's too far from your base, and you'd not get up this way far without our being warned in advance. So no matter what you know about the fort and the town, it'll not help Clark." He was arguing more to himself than to Cheves.

"And whatever you know about our future movements in the South—well, that doesn't matter either. You can't stop us. We'll retake Kaskaskia shortly. You can't fight us on equal ground. We're too powerful. We've got millions to your thousands."

A long silence followed which Eltinge ended by a brief snap of his fingers. He opened and stared through the door again and listened with a warning eye turned on Cheves. Then he swung around, unbuckled his pistol belt, with its shot and powder pouch, and handed it to the Virginian.

"Strap it on," he commanded.

Cheves, who had seen the processes of the man's mind go on, knew well enough what this meant.

"How will you clear yourself?" he asked, taking the belt.

"There wasn't any man of the guard available to bring down your food so I did it; they don't think I amount to much—the officers don't." He laughed bitterly at this. "They think I'm just a young lad. It won't be any trouble at all to make them believe that I was overpowered. 'Just boy foolishness and carelessness,' is what they'll say, and let it go at that. I'll probably get a few hard words from Hamilton, and that's all. Oh, I know how I stand around here. That's why they won't let me go on expeditions. Too young! Too inexperienced!" He spat the words out with venom, then came suddenly back to the business in hand and stripped off his great coat. "Let's change these. Cap, too."

The transfer was effected swiftly.

"Now listen closely," directed Eltinge. "Go straight up this corridor, take the stairs, and open the door on the first landing you reach. This avoids the mess room and puts you into another passage. Follow it down and you'll get to a door; unbolt it and you're out behind the fort. Only one chance in a thousand that you'll find anyone in that passage. Nothing but stores there. At the door I've put a pouch with some food in it, jerked meat and bread."

"Eltinge," queried Cheves, "why do you take all this trouble and put yourself in so much danger?"

The young lieutenant's eyes sparkled.

Here, at last, he was involved in direct adventure and it seemed to affect him like old wine.

"Because," he said briefly, "it isn't right, under any kind of war law, to shoot a good university man. There's only a few of us in the world and we've got to hang together. Some day, after this war's over, we'll have a few things to say about running governments; it may seem like treachery now, but we'll both be glad when we've quit fighting." It was idealism—sincere boyish idealism. Eltinge suddenly went shy. "Come, no tosh. One more thing. You'll have to mark me up. Let go with your fist and strike me in the eye. Got to leave me with some physical evidence of struggle."

Cheves said nothing; there was nothing to say. In his life he had met and encompassed a variety of strange happenings and out of this had grown a philosophy that was compounded largely of quiet acceptance when tight situations of a kind involved him. His mouth closed tighter; to save Eltinge suspense he shot a direct, hard blow at the slightly pale but entirely resolute face. It landed flush on the right eye. Eltinge clapped a hand up and staggered back. Cheves buttoned the coat and pulled down the cap.

"What time was it when you came down?" he asked.

"Ten o'clock," responded the lieutenant, still pressing his eye. "You'd better lose no time. Good luck."

"Good luck yourself," replied Cheves, and that was all.

He closed the door tightly and locked it, throwing the key in some dark recess farther on. It would take them an hour or better to find that key or to unhinge that door. Then he set out down the passage, swinging the lantern before. He went up the stairs and got through the first door, as directed. He was back, now, in the passage traversed earlier in the day. At the door he found the pouch. This he slung, got out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Blacker than pitch, this night. Against it the lantern gave but little assurance, yet it was sufficient to keep him from breaking his neck in some unexpected ditch. Doubtless there was a guard on both of the rear corner bastions, but from experience Cheves knew they would be within the shelter of the blockhouses, evading the driving, miserable rain. Discipline, Cheves had decided earlier, was somewhat lax in the fort.

He struck out through the first grove of woods, wherein he had fought his duel, got beyond it, and thence turned south, heading for the Ralston farm. He pronounced, as he went, a silent blessing upon Eltinge. Only a man untouched and unscarred by the hard suspicions and crafty deceits of frontier life could have done so unselfish a deed.

Chapter XI

DAN FELLOWS

BEYOND the southwestern angle of the fort the woods fell away for a space and the wind, coming northeasterly across the open waters of Lake St. Clair, rushed over the easy rise of the French farms in a gust of fury, bringing with it the lash and sting of rain. The lantern guttered and threatened to snuff out; and Cheves, having great need of its small comfort, sheltered it beneath his great coat. Travel was tedious and difficult. Long before he had embarked upon the main road from the fort a sweat covered his skin, while his hands and face were whipped raw.

He guessed it was near to midnight when finally he stumbled upon the side road and came through the Ralston orchard. A tentative use of the lantern revealed the pathway leading by the barn to the house. Thus he came to the small porch which fended the front door. There was no light within, but then it was long past time for bed; he stepped up and rapped strongly against the panel and waited, turning his back to the bitter wind. After an interval he rapped again, with greater force. This storm was near to drowning out all lesser noises.

But, with the passage of fifteen minutes, broken by as much effort as he could effect against the door, and productive of no results, he decided to force it and go inside. The lock was not turned and this struck him strangely enough, too, in a country where precautions were not usually overlooked. The living-room was still warm with the last embers in the fireplace. His lantern showed some evidence of disorder. A book or two tumbled from the shelf to the floor; the doors to the kitchen, to the second story, and to the bedroom off the living room were wide open.

"Colonel Ralston!" This time Cheves

raised his voice high enough to wake the sleepers.

And still he got no answer. In sudden impatience he walked to the bedroom; this, he was certain, belonged to the colonel. On the threshold he thrust forward the lantern and inspected the interior. The bed, neatly made, was unwrinkled and unoccupied. Here again he saw evidence of disorder; private letters, clothing, and a book or two thrown in a big heap in the center of the floor.

All the while a rising, premonitory thrust of fear had been working in the Virginian. He turned and made his way in the kitchen in a few swift strides. Again the same spectacle of wide-flung closet doors, and small disorder, with no human occupancy. There was left now but one other place, the second floor. Cheves was loath to go above, for that was Katherine's domain. He thrust his shoulders through the stairway door and called again.

No answer. He went up, now thoroughly aroused, and found himself in the single room which constituted the whole upper part of the house. The lanterns revealed the distinct feminine touch of this room; yet here again there spoke the same story: disorder, as though indicating sudden flight.

Sudden flight! Now why had he thought of that? Cheves turned on his steps and went below. Sudden flight! What would be the reason for their fleeing? No sooner had he asked himself that question than appeared before him the vindictive, vicious face of Danny Parmenter. Here, he was morally certain, rested the efforts of that fellow's malignant brain and cankerous heart.

"I'll hurt you so bad you'll die of the pain of it," Parmenter had threatened.

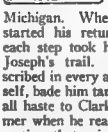
And here was the hurt. If he still doubted, Cheves told himself, he had only to remember the meeting of Parmenter and Colonel Ralston in the town that same day. The line of evidence was too strong to be overlooked. A roaring anger, a gritting, surpassing rage swept the Virginian; he was done forever with mild means. He would find that fellow and kill him, as he should have done long ago.

If they had fled Katherine would have left some note for him under the rock beside the barn. He retraced his steps down the pathway, found the rock and rolled it back. A white bit of paper, released of weight, skipped off in the wind. He made a wild dash and recovered it. By the lantern he read the few brief lines:

Richard: Danny brought back Father from town, ill. He says there is great danger and that we are to leave immediately. I don't understand it all, but Father believes him. I'm afraid, Dick. John left and didn't come back. What does that mean? Something terrible seems about to happen and there's no one I can trust save you; and you haven't time to worry over us. Danny says we are going to St. Joseph's, then down the Illinois to the Mississippi and on below to St. Louis. Oh, I wish you were here! Danny's face makes me shiver. It's a terrible night to start out. Pierre and François go with us, and I feel a little safer. Dick, come when you can! Katherine.

Bless her! Trying to be honest about the matter, and yet not wanting to pull him away from his duty. "You haven't time to worry over us." And Parmenter's face made her shiver! She couldn't keep out that foreboding note.

Perhaps Cheves never suffered so much as in the next fifteen minutes, pacing the ground and puzzling out his own best course of action.



HIS own trail was southward to the Maumee; the St. Joseph's trail turned sharp westward, across the lower end of the peninsula to the small fort which sat on the south tip of Lake Michigan. When he left this house and started his return journey to Kaskaskia each step took him farther from the St. Joseph's trail. And his plain duty inscribed in every argument he thrust at himself, bade him tarry no longer; but to make all haste to Clark. It would be late summer when he reached his chief with information that might lead to an expedition northward. And if that expedition were to be successful it must start before the fall storms. Thus on his celerity depended a large measure of the conquest of Detroit and the Northwest. The conquest of a kingdom for America!

It was a battle of heart and head with this loyal Virginian. The colonel, he knew, would be so much clay in Parmenter's hands. The two Frenchmen, very steadfast to the family, would protect the girl as long as they were able. But once Parmenter had the upper hand, there was no

fathomable depth to his iniquity. No man can plumb the mind of a renegade; and Parmenter was a renegade.

Yet out of it all came one unalterable conclusion. The party did not dare to touch the British St. Joseph's. They would skirt it, gain the Illinois River, descend it to the Mississippi, and thence go down by rapid, easy stages to the Spanish town of St. Louis. Such being the route, Parmenter would hardly pick a quarrel with the men of the party until St. Louis was within striking distance; he needed such strength as he possessed too badly to do away with any of them. Posing as British he would gain through the Indian tribes without difficulty. Here, then, was Cheves' hope: to return to Kaskaskia as fast as he was able, and having completed his mission, to strike up the Mississippi and meet the party. Then he would settle with Danny Parmenter.

It was a slim, tenuous hope and it made Cheves groan to think of what might happen on the long trail down the Illinois. Again, he repeated to himself, the heart of a renegade was unfathomable. But he had no alternative. It was a struggle of head and heart; and the head won, albeit it fairly tore him in twain to make the decision.

Now he must go; there was much territory to be put between he and Detroit town before daybreak filtered through the storm. He left the house, traversed the path and by-road, and came again to the main road; continued southward on it until it dwindled to a thin Indian trace; skirted the river; abruptly left it to plunge westward through a forest; heading ever for the broad highway of the Maumee. He went as fast as his long legs would permit, holding nothing for reserve. The lantern guttered and was extinguished; with an oath of regret he threw it away and continued on. In his heart was a heaviness which he wistfully hoped not many men might be called upon to suffer. The very light of life itself grew more drab the farther he advanced upon the plain path of duty. He wondered why his own lot never seemed to correspond to the many tales of romantic love he had heard or read, where dawn was rose-shot, and life seemed an unending bliss.

Westward the course of empire! The unbending, loyal fibre of such men as Richard Cheves made that empire possible. Lesser, weaker-grained men could not have done the work. He plunged on through the rioting night. Though every instinct of private and personal desire might cry out in outraged feeling, he could not change his decision; the blood of Virginia held him fast. Eight hundred miles south Clark waited, curbing his bold, impatient imagination until his messenger arrived.

Morning two days later found Cheves forging a steady way up the Maumee trail toward the portage. He did not fear being overtaken now, for he knew that only an Indian runner could keep a faster pace than the one he traveled, and since he came from the direction of Detroit and wore part British equipment he had but little fear of any obstacle ahead. Thus he relaxed vigilance. The storm which had cloaked his escape from the British stronghold passed over, and now the wet woods steamed under the hot summer's sun.

Once, at noon, he stopped beside the river to eat. When he turned to leave again he found himself confronted by the sudden apparition of a squad of savages advancing out of concealment. Boldly he adopted the ranger's front, threw up a hand in salutation, and waited. To enlighten them he shoved forward the British pistol and holster, with which he knew they were acquainted. They spoke in a tongue he could not understand but took to be Ottawa, since this was their country. He shook his head and tried French with equal futility. English was equally incomprehensible to them, and so he at last fell back upon the universal language of signs.

He was, he told them in this medium, from Detroit, going southward, and in very much of a hurry. Three gestures accomplished this much for him, hands forward and back, and a rapid moving of feet. The Big Knives were sending out war parties and he hastened in advance to warn the lower forts. They nodded gravely, understanding much of this by implication. They also had scouts out and even now some of their chiefs were at Detroit with the white chiefs. A few ceremonious gestures, and they filed in behind him as he retook the path. For an hour they gave him company and then silently faded into the brush and were gone.

EVENING brought him by an immense grove of water maple; the river shallowed up and formed a long sliding riffle which sent its wash of sound out through the surrounding territory. Through this Cheves thread-

ed his way, going as long as there was a ray of daylight to guide him. He had come through a copse of hazel, making a horeshoe turn to go by a scarp of rock when, on looking ahead, he saw a tall bearded fellow advancing along the path. Throwing up a hand, the Virginian stopped. The amazing thing happened when the fellow got within ten yards. He had been staring at Cheves with earnest seeking on his face, and now the gaunt, black features broke into a huge smile. A cavernous mouth let out a whoop of joy.

"Yeee-ipp! Wal—Dick! Dog me, ef it hain't yerself! Whar in thunderation ye goin' now?"

All that Cheves, amazed, could see was a mass of whiskers and white teeth. When they got quite close he caught the outline of the bold jaw, the steel gray eyes, and the beak of a nose. An immediate shaft of warmth and security invaded him.

"Dan Fellows!" he cried in delight.

"Yup. What's left o' him. Ain't she a hell of a country to get through?" His face darkened. "Whar's that rat Parmenter and his friend Sartaine? They lit out beyint you, bent on mischief, so I jest took a chaw er baccy an' my gun an' sot beyint them."

"Haven't seen Sartaine," replied Cheves. An idea struck him and left him with an expanding heart. He turned off the path and started toward the river. "We camp here."

Thereafter they were busy exchanging notes over the fire and the grub.

"Gosh a'mighty!" exclaimed Fellows in a rage, when he heard of Parmenter's career in Detroit. The presence of the Ralstons amazed him, and the whole tangle left him lowering with doubt and anger. "Ef I ever see Parmenter I'm a-goin' to kill him, s' help me. A dad-burned rat! Sartaine he prob'ly done for along the trail somewhar's. But the Ralstons! Whut in thunder air we a-goin' to do, Dick?"

"You're goin' to start back to Clark with my information," said Cheves. "I'm turnin' off now for the St. Joseph's trail. The Maumee parallels it right along here. I'd gues they were a day behind me, since I've been travelin' single and fast. It's a fifty-mile jump from this trail to that one. I ought to intercept them tomorrow night or the next day."

The gaunt featured backwoodsman grew solemn.

"Dick, she's a hell of a journey around Quitanon, an' I thought like I'd lose my hair by Vincennes. But I'll go! Whut's the larnin' I'm to take back?"

Cheves summarized it briefly; bit by bit the sparkle returned to the elder man's eyes.

"You'll have to make a fast trip," warned Cheves. "If Clark is to come North he'll be wanting to start before the snow flies. I'm comin' down the Mississippi with the Ralstons, and without Parmenter."

Fellows' fist clenched across the fire.

"Dick, don't ye take no chances," he insisted. "Shoot him like a copperhead. Don't you git any hifalutin' notions about his honor. Birds don't have teeth; nuther do renegades have any Virginny spirit. I'm afeard you'll be a givin' him too much rope and fust thing he'll stab you in the back. You don't never take a hint from the tricks he's worked. Now you be foreminded and watch him clost."

"I understand thoroughly," returned Cheves somberly. "Be sure you explain to Clark the reason I'm doin' this. Let's turn in now; there's hard work ahead."

Fellows sighed and shook his head, running a horny paw across the jet whiskers.

"Wisht you'd let me go. Ain't never been a time but what you give him too much leeway. I'm dumned afeard." Sitting cross legged before the fire, black and saturnine of visage, and brooding of eye, he appeared a harbinger of Fate. He sighed again.

"Damn Quitanon! Wisht they'd a built it a hunderd miles to one side o' the Wabash. Took me a week to git around it. Thought I was nigh to losin' my hair, too."

The fire sank lower and the swish of the riffles lulled them to a wary sleep.

That night, one hundred miles to the northeast Colonel Henry Ralston gave up this life from physical exhaustion, and Parmenter's somber eyes seemed flecked with sardonic amusement as tragedy stalked abroad for Katherine Ralston.

CHAPTER XII

SHOWDOWN

TRAGEDY stalked abroad for Katherine Ralston, yet, being a thoroughbred woman, she closed her mouth tight down over the impulse to loose bitter tears and reined her horse—she rode the single plow horse that the Ralston place had boasted—to follow Parmenter and the two Frenchmen. They

had buried her father in a crude, unsatisfactory way in the sandy soil of a creek bottom and weighted the grave down with rocks. This latter precaution had been the stubborn insistence of Pierre and François; Parmenter looked on and cursed them for the delay. Then it was the girl saw this man's real worth and turned away to shudder. Betwixt her and the menace of him was only the strength of the two servants. She wondered how long they would resist the cunning and trickery he displayed; and wondering, was lost in an abyss of misery. Better a thousand times imprisonment in Detroit than all the misfortune now upon them!

The trip through the storm had been a nightmare, made increasingly terrible by the knowledge that her father gave up more of his small supply of vitality with each punishing step after Parmenter. And now the irony of it! With her father dead and buried, Parmenter had relaxed the pace.

"I think we can slow up a bit," he said, dropping beside her. "We're out of their track. Cheer up, my dear. Don't look so solemn. Your father was an old man; his time had come to die."

She kept her gaze straight ahead, not replying, not even wishing to notice him. Anger struggled through a dead load of grief.

"And don't pout," he added with a touch of petulance. "I'm goin' to get you out of a difficult situation. You should be grateful for that. I think, when we get to St. Louis, you should show your appreciation in a more tangible form, my dear."

She blazed up at that, turning fairly toward him.

"Danny, have you not enough courtesy to keep from calling me endearing names to which you have no right? Can't you ever be a gentleman? Must you always be using unfair means to make love?"

"Unfair?" He grew sullen on the instant. "You've never been anything but unfair to me, young lady! Didn't you play with me and then throw me over for that scoundrel, Cheves?"

"Stop! I'll not have you call him that! You don't even possess decency enough not to run a man down behind his back. I thought there never was a Virginia man who would do that!"

"Don't use heroics on me. I won't stand for them. All that kind of sentiment is dead. Honor—decency! Pah! Those are just subterfuges you women nurse to keep a man off, until you want him. Don't try them on me," Parmenter menaced.

"I wish," she said, very pale, "that Richard Cheves were here."

"That paragon of virtue! That sugar-mouthed, wooden-faced, lead soldier! You'll never see him again." Parmenter sneered with a short, contemptuous laugh. "He's one of these toadyin' general's pets, and so help me, I'll settle with him some of these days!"

The vitriolic passion in his voice startled Katherine; she squared about in the saddle, hoping that he might leave and go ahead. He had raised his voice to such a pitch that Pierre, marching fifty yards in advance, turned about and halted; a dogged expression on his face.

"Get ahead!" stormed Parmenter, swayed by his rage. "Who told you to drop back here?"

"I stay here eef I like, you unerstan'?" replied Pierre. "I don' take no talk from a fallow like you," he glowered.

Parmenter shifted a hand to his pistol. Something in the steady expression of the Frenchman halted that movement, and he finished by brushing past the man and striding along the trail.

"Pierre," breathed the girl, "stay by me."

"*Mais oui*; eef he use hees mout' too much, Pierre he weel close eet."

"I never knew," she said, more to herself than to her servant, "that he could be so violent."

"Hees eye, Pierre don' like. Dere's wan bad cast, like a wil' horse."

The trail to St. Joseph's was a thing to be hunted for and carefully kept, so thin and uncertain a trace did it make through the varied country of the lower peninsula. After leaving Detroit they had passed a succession of hard wood groves. Now pine began to cover the ground and the trail twisted through multifold varieties of underbrush. They forded a stream shrunk to the size of a creek—and here lost the way altogether.

Parmenter scouted ahead for the best part of a forenoon before finding the route, which did not help his surly disposition in the least. Once, the elder Frenchman, François, got in his path. The Virginian shoved him aside with a grunt of disgust. François hit the ground and his wrinkled face puckered from the hurt of it. Pierre gave a shout and grabbed at his waist. The sun glinted on the blade of his knife as he came by Parmenter's elbow.

"Don' make dat meestake no more," he growled. "You wan' t' fight; eh? *Alors*,

anny time you say, den we fight."

Parmenter thrust a bloodshot glance at him and forged on; Pierre dropped back, shaking his head in manifest displeasure, to shoot a rapid volley of French at his partner.

THE afternoon shimmered and danced under September heat; the pace of the party slackened, each member suffering. Even the patient, slow footed horse moved with difficulty, tongue hanging sidewise from its mouth. Pierre stalked directly ahead of Katherine and François kept the middle ground between the young Frenchman and Parmenter. The latter's face had gone white. Obviously the man suffered in a physical way, but still stronger was the goad of his temper, stinging him to fury. His initial hatred of Cheves was rendered the more intense by Katherine Ralston's contempt and Pierre's cool defiance.

Added to this was perhaps a fear that he made ill progress on the St. Joseph's trail. The signs of travel had faded into the forest carpet some distance back. He judged his way now solely by the width and accessibility of the terrain ahead. He had embarked upon this expedition with knowledge and confidence mostly assumed. Now he floundered and doubted. The rest of the party kept its own counsel and suffered in silence.

The sun fell over the horizon, and the cool of evening brought its sweet relief. They crossed a green bottom and came to a creek. Parmenter waded and kept his way. The Frenchman stopped to see that horse and rider got safely over. The animal limped patiently to the water's edge and stopped to drink. Katherine felt its flanks quiver.

"Poor Ted," she said, "he's very tired. And so am I. Why can't we stop here for the night. Perhaps we'll not find water farther on."

Pierre nodded his head and thrust up a hand for her to dismount. Thus he took the management of the party on his own shoulders. François mumbled a word of warning, to which Pierre responded by a shrug and motioned for his partner to get fire-wood.

Parmenter threshed back through the brush and sent a shout across the creek.

"We don't stop here. There's another mile or better to go before dark. Come along."

"We stop w'en ma'm'selle ees tired, m'sieu," replied Pierre, all softness. "Eef you wan' t' go anudder mile, *allez*." He spoke in a pleasant way, yet, anticipating the coming storm, squared toward the Virginian and thrust both hands to his hips.

"Be careful, Pierre," warned the girl. She raised her voice. "If you don't mind, Danny, I'd like to stop here. I'm so tired."

"It isn't the same to me," yelled Parmenter, "and I'll have no half-breed tellin' me what to do! Pick up the reins of that horse, put the 'girl back on, and come through," he ordered.

But Pierre was pleasantly obstinate. He manipulated a shrug, without letting his hands stray far from the sheath-knife.

"Ma'm'selle is ver' tired. We rest here."

"Will you do as I say?" roared Parmenter. The pistol came to his hand.

"Never mind, Pierre," said the girl. "I'll get back on."

Pierre smiled and shook his head. His eyes never wavering from the pistol.

"We stay here, m'sieu," he repeated, and gathered his muscles.

The pistol came level with Parmenter's angry eyes. The Frenchman gave a prodigious leap aside and down as the report came, and uttered a cry of pain. He had not been quick enough; the bullet caught him in the arm.

He was up, next instant, leaping forward with the spring of an injured cat, fumbling for his knife with the left hand. Parmenter reversed his pistol and waited.

"Don't, Pierre!" cried the girl. "Don't!"

Pierre stumbled through the water, gathered himself, and sprang upon Parmenter. Katherine Ralston, looking fearfully on, saw the knife describe an arc and slash through the Virginian's tunic; saw, at the same time, the heavy pistol butt come down upon the Frenchman's head. The latter slid to the ground, leaving Parmenter above him, swaying and holding fast to a shoulder.

"The beggar slashed me," he said, then raised his head. "Now will you do as I say? Come on!" he snarled.

"No," said the girl, "I will not."

And Parmenter, breathing heavily, glared at her for a full minute in a battle of wills, then gave in.

"All right," he yielded sullenly. He gave the prone figure a prod with his foot and recrossed the stream. "Get the wood," he ordered François.

Katherine Ralston went to the creek.

"Where you goin'?" queried Parmenter.

She refused to answer, waded the stream and knelt beside Pierre. Parmenter sat apathetically on a log and watched her spill water on the unconscious man's face.

Presently Pierre stirred and sat up, got his bearings and protested at her ministrations. "Eet's noddin'. Mam'selle, she should not bodder wit' me."

Despite her protests he struggled to his feet and returned across the stream. It distressed him to see her wading in the water, yet he did not dare to carry her over. So he stood helpless and swore to himself that such a situation was terrible beyond the name of a name.

Franço.s nursed the fire and Pierre made shift at supper, with now and then a covert glance at Parmenter. It was plain to see that he put no trust in the other. But the Virginian scarce stirred. The whole driving animus that rendered him active and dangerous had apparently evaporated, and he seemed only a dull, petty sort of figure, engrossed wholy in himself. A tinge of red colored one sleeve of his shirt; the knife wound was, from all appearances, only a scratch. When the time came to eat, the girl, out of the pure sympathy of her heart, motioned for him to get his share. Mechanically he obeyed. It put courage in her to see him thus, and she did dare to ask him a question that had long been troubling her.

"Danny, where are we now?" she queried.

"A little better than half-way to St. Joseph's," he replied. "And off the trail. I think we're too far south."

She had not the heart to ask more. A fresh feeling of despondency swept her; with all the misfortune of this ill-starred journey, the culminating catastrophe must come to break her small shoulders. It took the savor from the food she ate.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she prayed, softly, inaudibly, "where are you? Will you never come?"

T THAT moment Richard Cheves, guided by the pistol shot, had reached the creek at a lower point and was following it up-stream. That shot was the first tangible result of a heart-breaking three-day journey. A bit later he turned a bend and caught the cheerful light of the fire. Here he crossed the stream, without noise, and threaded the trees.

Fifty yards off he stopped to forewarn himself. He saw, first of all, like a sinister beacon, the hunched form of Parmenter on the log; next, he caught alternate sight of the Frenchmen as they moved about the clearing for fire wood. And, with a stirring heart that seemed recompense enough for the toil and privation he had undergone, he saw last of all the small, bowed figure of Katherine Ralston looking soberly into the flames. Though he searched all parts of the clearing he did not find Colonel Ralston, and this troubled him. Well, time to go forward; time to put a full stop to his worries and their worries. He shifted his holster and advanced to the light.

Katherine saw him first; it was wonderful to note the way her face changed from shadow to sunlight.

"Dick!" she cried.

Parmenter sprang to his feet as though stung by a scorpion and reached for his gun. It was then too late; Cheves stood in front of him.

"Easy, Danny, just a moment. You and I'll square up, in just a minute," he said. Then he turned to the girl and announced simply, "I came as fast as I could, as soon as I could, Katherine."

"I knew you would." Her face echoed her words.

"Where," he said, in that same somber, granite-like tone, "is your father?"

"Dead," she whispered. "It was too hard for him."

She saw his face clearly then, as he turned toward Danny Parmenter and the fire. It was thin and fatigued from hard traveling, with lines stamped upon it that do not belong to a man of twenty-eight. The hard frontier! It was not a life for soft men, and if frontier hearts were sometimes steeled beyond human compassion it was because inexorable forces so tempered them. Woman-like, she pitied Danny Parmenter.

"Well," said Cheves, "are you ready now?"

"My gun is not loaded."

"I heard it a while back," Cheves acknowledged. "Load it."

His eyes did not leave Parmenter while the operation took place.

"All right, go in front of me, Danny, straight down the creek." He turned to Katherine. "One of us will be back in a moment."

Her heart constricted until it seemed on the verge of breaking. She thought to cry out and say, "Don't! Let well enough

be!" But she knew immediately that here was a man whose mind she could not now change. So she bowed her head lest he might see the suffering on it, and clenched her hands.

She heard the brush crack under foot, and the steady tramp of deliberate steps marching to duel, receding out of hearing until all was silent. The whole world stood on tiptoe, it seemed, waiting for the one event to take place. Pierre refueled the fire and, while still kneeling, crossed himself. She found herself counting.

The roar of a pistol shot rushed through the woods; she gave a small cry and immediately suppressed it. One shot! Only one shot! One man had not even a chance to fire! Pierre sprang up, all aquiver.

"By gar, I bet Parmenter he shoot biffor de time come! Dere ees wan cast in dose eye, like a wil' horse!"

Again she found herself counting and listening, wholly numb to all other thought and sensation.

The second shot!

Soon she heard the methodic tramp of a man's feet, growing louder and louder until he stood on the threshold of the clearing, until he had come by the fire, until he stood before her. With a supreme effort of will she forced up her head; and found there the grave, lined face of Richard Cheves looking down at her with inexpressible hope and longing and sadness.

She gave a cry and was the next moment in his arms. The whole pent-up flood of emotion broke and swept her away. She was crying, crying as though her heart were like to break. Cheves held her, saying nothing at all, but fully content to hold her.

HEY skirted St. Joseph's and came to the navigable Illinois. Here Cheves boldly entered an Indian village and bartered for a canoe. With it they continued down the river in long stages until the broad Mississippi met them. They paddled ever southward and one fine day sighted an American flag over Kaskaskia. Clark was there to meet them, and after attending to the girl, took Cheves to his headquarters. Fellows had come through a week previously with the vital news, but Clark wanted the information first-hand and Cheves told his story from beginning to end.

Clark's aggressive, stubborn face lit. "They will come south, then, Cheves?"

"Hamilton at the head of the party," Cheves nodded.

"When will this be, do you think?"

"Between now and winter. There's but a small force in Detroit and they can't spare many men now."

"That's our opportunity!" Clark's fist smote the puncheon table. "Colonel Hamilton never will see Detroit again if he comes."

With the information Cheves had brought back from the British post, George Rogers Clark won the Northwest for a new and democratic nation. Hamilton and Dejean came south in the fall of that same year. Clark engaged then in the winter campaign across the Illinois drowned lands and took them both prisoners of war. The victory forever ended British dominion south of Detroit. Henceforth the whole broad sweep of that plain was American. The power of Detroit town had been broken by one audacious commander backed by the impatient and rugged men under him. Of that Northwestern victory Cheves performed the pioneer work that made the last great coup possible. As another result of Cheves' arduous undertaking, the Americans embarked on a system of rangers to combat the British. Throughout the Wabash land these solitary voyagers met and successfully coped with foreign representatives, stood before Indian camp-fires and told of a new authority in the land. The Long Knives—the Americans—had come to stay.

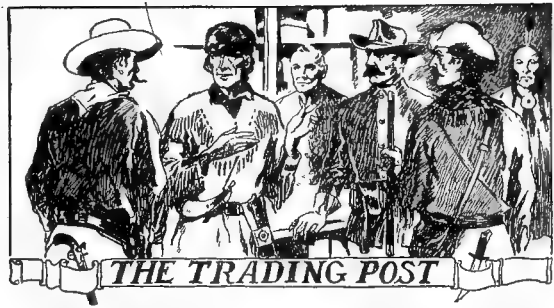
It was within the fort at Kaskaskia that Katherine Ralston and Richard Cheves were married.

"I can't leave this country," he told her. "It's a great empire. You and I have helped make it and we've got to stay. There'll be thousands coming across the Alleghanies and down the Ohio to keep us company. Here I shall stake my claim."

"Where you go, there I shall be," she reminded him.

On the rich bottom land of the Illinois, fronting the Mississippi, Cheves made his home.

ONE would suppose that the town of Port Tobacco, in Charles County, Maryland, was so called on account of its importance as a shipping point for "the weed." But, rather, it derived its name from an Indian village known to its inhabitants as *Potopaco* that existed nearby in the seventeenth century.—F. W. H.



THE INDIAN TERRITORY

THE United States contains many spots of romantic and historic interest unfamiliar to the average citizen; likewise American history is dotted with absorbingly interesting but little known epochs and incidents. In "The Last Domino," the complete novel in this issue, J. E. Grinstead gives a vivid picture of one of these —the Indian Territory, the Oklahoma of today, in the little known period of Indian dominion. For those who are unfamiliar with Oklahoma's territorial history, Mr. Grinstead here gives a birdseye view of the situation.

"A little while ago," says he, "there lay between the states of Texas and Kansas a little more than 70,000 square miles of wonderful country, uninhabited except by a few thousand Indians, and an occasional big ranch that had leased grazing rights from the Indians.

"The northern part of that great domain was prairie, bleak and bare. Also, it lay next to Kansas, which was itself sparsely settled at that time. On the south was Texas, an empire in itself. The line between Texas and Oklahoma, as you also know, is Red River. For a distance of something over three hundred miles on an air line, and probably more than four hundred, following the meanders of the stream, was a stage on which was enacted as many remarkable tragedies, perhaps, as ever occurred in a like territory in all the history of the world."

Again the secret of convincing fiction is found in actual experience. Like so many others of our authors, Mr. Grinstead is a frontiersman from way back. The son of a government wagon-master who hauled freight into Fort Laramie, Fort Bridger, Fort Bent and other frontier posts, and who was also a "forty-niner," Grinstead got his frontier training from the "ground up."

"My youth was spent on a ranch," he writes, "within a half day's easy ride of the Texas-Oklahoma border-line. I was as familiar with it as any boy is with the woods lot where he played 'Indians' with his fellows, only there was no play about it. It was a lawless country, or, rather, every man was a law unto himself. That unique weapon of offense and defense, invented by Col. Samuel Colt, was the final arbiter.

"The fact that the characters in 'The Last Domino' are distinctly unusual is because they are real composite pictures of hundreds that I knew personally. It is not necessary for the fictionist to paint his Western characters. Except that he must soften the tints! Many true stories that I could tell would never get by the most lenient editor of a magazine.

"There were outstanding characters among the Indians that I knew. Old Col. LaFlore, and many others of the same class, were as real among the Indians as Calvin Coolidge and Senator Whosis are among the American people today, and occupied the same exalted positions. The most eloquent oration that I have ever heard was made by an old chief, a graduate of Harvard. When he came to the emotional crises in his address, thinking in his native tongue, he would lapse into that language, which lent itself to word painting as fully as does our own English. In fact, the reference to Washington and

Tishomingo, in LaFlore's remarks in 'The Last Domino,' was lifted bodily from that old chief's oration."

We of THE FRONTIER are always interested in the white pioneers who venture into such frontier territory as this, and are interested in the transformation they achieve. Indeed, Oklahoma is a model of transformation from wilderness to civilization.

"The white people who lived in that country were pioneers," Mr. Grinstead says, "adventurers if you please, and along with them a preponderance of vagrant, lawless characters, many of whom were as bad as men could be. There were no railroads; there were no bridges on Red River. Every dozen miles or so there was a ferry on that boiling, turbulent stream, with its brackish red water, and shifting quicksands. Between the ferries there were trail crossings, that only those who knew the way could follow. At every ferry and every trail crossing there were enacted tragedies. At some of them dozens and even hundreds of tragedies. I knew the whole country intimately, until the original Oklahoma was opened to settlement. I got a close-up view of that strange performance. Later, I was in the councils of the chiefs when they were negotiating with the Federal Government for the surrender of their tribal suzerainty. I saw their lands, which had been held in common, alloted to them. Today, when I travel through the splendid State of Oklahoma, I am amazed that such change could have taken place in so short a time. Beautiful towns stand on spots where I held herds of cattle in my youth, and prosperous farmhouses on other spots where I slept on the bald prairie, my head on my saddle and my bronc lariated to the saddle-horn."

THE CHEROKEE STRIP

CLEM YORE'S story, "Spittin' Bill and Whittlin' Dick," in this issue, is another with part of its setting in Oklahoma. Again it is first-hand experience which gives the story its verisimilitude.

"As a boy I made the rush on horseback at the opening of the Cherokee Strip for a St. Louis newspaper and I saw the most tremendous excitement it has ever been my luck to behold," says Mr. Yore. "In 'Spittin' Bill and Whittlin' Dick' I have touched somewhat on this chaos; on the frenzy of the day, the wildness of the night; greater than Klondike's stampede.

"I saw a 'sooner' shot by a cavalryman at one point; saw a woman back a bunch of men away with a shotgun, from a stake where she had 'squatted' with a fast team; saw a captain of the army rush up to an elderly civilian and fling an arm around his shoulder. Later I learned they had last met on the Overland Trail in the late sixties.

"Three years ago I heard an old man tell of how he came to the West, the first time, and the massacre section of my tale is almost word for word, as I recall it, the story this ancient plainsman told."

THE MORMON TRAIL

ANOTHER all too little known era of American history will furnish the complete novel for our next issue. An American epoch in itself was the great Mormon migration, the long trains of covered wagons and plodding hand-carts crawling over the plains to the founding of a new Zion—and the eventual establishment of a new American state. This Mormon migration is graphically described by Col. George Brydges Rodney in "The Mormon Trail," a story with a warm human element as well as an authentic historical background.

In the same number will be three novelettes. "Extermination Island," by Theodore Goodridge Roberts, is laid in the West Indies in the early part of the eighteenth century. From the moment that Captain Bracket arises from his place at dinner and tweaks the governor's nose action starts—and swords and pistols vie with each other to keep it up. "Some Call It Fate," by Barrie Lynd, takes you to Portuguese East Africa, where is hatched a plot which promises to realize the natives' dream of independence. Edwin Hunt Hoover furnishes the third novelette with "Homengil, Gunman," a story of the West and a man who faced it with a smoking six-gun.

Anthony Rud will be along with another of his short stories of the Southern frontier; Clarence E. Mulford will be on hand with a fine article on "The Fur Trade"; Alanson Skinner, who started his Indian series in this issue, will have the second article on "Tribes of the Middle West." And there will be others.

THE AMERICAN INDIAN

NOW that you have had the first of Mr. Skinner's Indian articles we should be glad to have your reaction to it—in fact we are always glad to hear how you

like any of our articles, or stories. Of course THE FRONTIER is primarily a fiction magazine and articles are somewhat of an experiment for us, but the demand for them has seemed to be genuine, and there is such a wealth of tempting material, that it is difficult to judge how many of these articles you want.

Of course, it is obvious that in the limited space we can allow for Mr. Skinner's Indian articles, he can give only the barest outline of the tribes he discusses; indeed it often wrings his ethnologist's heart to see some of the favorite items we are forced to exclude. For the guidance of you who want to follow the subject further, Mr. Skinner has furnished a brief bibliography which will be very helpful. Here it is—in Mr. Skinner's own words:

"First and foremost there is the standard work on American Indians, which is equally valuable in the study of any group of tribes north of Mexico. That is 'The Handbook of American Indians,' or 'Bulletin No. 30 of the Bureau of American Ethnology, of Washington, D. C.' It is now out of print and you are lucky indeed if you can pick up the two chubby green volumes at any second-hand store for five or six dollars, but you can find it in almost any public library.

"The 'Handbook' is an encyclopedia of information on all things Indian. It is alphabetically arranged, and all you have to do is to look up what you want. It is the best and only general work of its kind, and was edited by F. W. Hodge, now of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, of New York, when he was Chief of the Bureau.

"Then there is Clark Wissler's 'North American Indian,' which takes up many of the problems that scientists are interested in. It is published by Douglas C. McMurtrie, of New York. But, while it's a good general work, it's a little too deep for the casual student.

"Now for New England proper, first and foremost, is good old Roger Williams' 'Key.' It's a pity that the original work can't be found easily, but a reprint occurs in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Vol. 1, 1827. It, too, is rare, but it can be had in the larger libraries, anyway.

"Most of the source books of New England Indians are rare, because they are so old. Forest's 'Indians of Connecticut' is a fairly modern work that may be available, and there is a lot in racy old English hidden between the covers of Wood's 'New England's Prospect,' and Josselyn's work, the title of which has slipped me, but it is something like 'New England's Rarities Discovered.'

"For the Algonkian tribes around New York, Vol. III of the Anthropological Papers of the Amcrican Museum of Natural History, and the chapters on the archeology of Manhattan Island, of Throggs Neck and Classon's Point in the Bronx, many of them written my myself.

"Nobody who is interested in the Delawares should fail to read 'The Lenape and Their Legends,' by Daniel G. Brinton, Philadelphia, 1885. It is a fascinating work, and gives the first part of the famous Walam Olum, or Red Score, in full, with a brief sketch of the Lenape or Delawares and their kindred. Then, in recent years Mr. M. R. Harrington has published an excellent paper on the 'Religion of the Lenape' in the 'Indian Notes and Monographs' of this museum, the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

"Of course there are a lot of other works, and if anyone wants any particular information that he does not find either here or in the articles if he will write to me in care of THE FRONTIER, I will be more than glad to furnish anything that I can."

RED KNIVES

ANOTHER writer with the pioneering lure in his blood is Ernest Haycox, author of "Red Knives," in this issue—which helps to account for that fine tale.

"My own family came over from England about four generations back and settled in what is now the business center of Cleveland," says Mr. Haycox. "Since that time my particular branch has been moving westward, trying a hand at town marshaling in the early Arizona days, sheepherding, soldiering, steamboating, railroading, hoboing, homesteading, logging, shingle-weaving—most anything to earn a dollar and see the country. I guess that explains my bias in favor of pioneers."

With a background and an experience such as this to draw from the inspiration for "Red Knives" needs little explanation.

"'Red Knives' was the result of some research for a historical book," the author tells us, however. "At the time the book was the important thing, but as I read through all the chronicles of what these early pioneers had done the idea of a story

came along and wouldn't be denied. These people had done so much, had fought so hard against such overwhelming odds. They had gone forward with a kind of courage and faith that would not be denied. For every man struck down by a Shawnee lance or Huron war hatchet there were others to go on, a little grimmer of purpose, a little more determined to see the land beyond the hill and the plain beyond the river. It would be hard, in looking through the history of advancing civilizations, to find another group of men so individualistic in temperament, so buoyant, or so stoical."

THE FOREIGN LEGION

QUITE a different sort than the pioneer of our own West is the Legionaire, the pioneer who carries the mailed fist of the white man into the far places of the African deserts. J. D. Newsom, author of "The Legionaire," in this issue, knows these rough fellows and sees beneath their tough epidermis.

"The Legionaire isn't a very fine fellow," Newsom says, "but I think he's true to type. Moreover, in a tight corner, I'm mighty sure that few of these men would let their friends down. They're misfits, but at heart, for the most part, they are sound.

"I collected most of the material that goes to make up 'The Legionaire' quite some years ago, in a *debit de vin*, in a side street of the Menilmontant district of Paris. Judged by tourist standards, it was not a nice place, and many of the regular customers looked as if they ought to have police records. As a mater of fact, they had.

"Among them was a former Legionaire with whom I played backgammon, and between games he used to talk of Africa and the 'dear, dead days,' except that he used other, more powerful adjectives to describe those days."

THE BOWIE KNIFE

AN ITEM in a recent issue of our "Do You Know That—?" column credited Colonel James Bowie with the invention of the Bowie knife and to back up the statement there are several authorities we can quote. However, the item evidently stepped into controversial territory, for already several readers have taken exception to it.

D. R. Loche, a Texan at present making his home in New York, explained the situation in detail and we print part of his good letter herewith:

The bowie-knife was neither invented nor named for Col. James Bowie, several authorities to the contrary notwithstanding. The first bowie-knife was made by a negro blacksmith, whose name I forget, on the plantation of Rexin P. Bowie, brother of James. It was made from a horse-rasp and subsequently was acquired by Rezin. History does not relate whether the acquisition was in the form of: "Say, Eli, that's a fine knife you've made, I'll give you a dollar and a quarter for it," or "Here, you no-'count rascal, what're you doing with a knife like that? Give it to me." But Rezin displayed his new weapon to several friends and enemies and it had such an effect, particularly upon the latter, that the new style was eagerly adopted and christened after the original possessor, the "Bowie-knife." It is only natural that Jim Bowie would have been among the first to adopt his brother's weapon, and everyone knows how he used his knife.

Let me assure you the above is only a "love lick" and that I hope to go on reading THE FRONTIER as long as I can keep within reach of newsstands. More power to you and may the Frontiers never grow less.

Perhaps some others of our readers may have some light to throw on the question. Undoubtedly history and authorities generally credit Jim Bowie with the invention; equally certain is it that many who "are in the know" have another version of the story.

THE MAIL POUCH

HERE is a man who has a hard time waiting for the twentieth of the month to roll around—and, judging from our correspondence, he is not the only one:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

Just finished reading No. 4 of your wonderful magazine and it's going to be one darn long wait for your next issue. Don't suppose you could change your plans and issue THE FRONTIER two or three times a month. Just had to drop you a line and compliment you and your fine magazine, "The Valley of Strife" in your last issue is a truly wonderful story.

Again wishing you the best in 1925 and with kind regards.

Frank Platte,
888 Grand Ave.,
St. Paul, Minn.

Robert V. Carr's "Seven Gay Riders" made a hit the moment it appeared—as this reader will testify:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

I've read your wonderful magazine ever since it came out. The story that I liked best in this issue was "Seven Gay Riders," and, believe me, it sure was a peach! I wish there were more like it.

READERS' FAVORITE COUPON

"Readers' Favorite" Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Garden City, N. Y.

The stories in this number I like best are those marked below (indicate your favorites by numerals 1 to 5.)

___ The Puncher	___ Beginnings of San Antonio
___ The Last Domino	___ The Crime of King Kombali
___ Early Western Rumbles	___ Bill Tilghmen
___ The Royal Canadian Mounted Police	___ Spear of the Valorous
___ Spittin' Bill and Whittlin' Dick	___ Tribes of New England
___ The Landsman Serves a Gun	___ The Thirteenth Notch
___ The Legionaire	___ Red Knives

I did not like_____

Name_____ Address_____

Here's to success for your magazine.

George H. Butler,
551 Kipling St.,
Akron, Ohio.

The writer of the following letter touches upon a point which is a matter of particular pride with us—namely, the publication of a magazine that is thoroughly clean and decent from cover to cover, safe reading for anyone:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

May I say that I consider THE FRONTIER a welcome addition to SHORT STORIES, which I have read with pleasure for many years. Just keep the magazine as clean as SHORT STORIES has always been and it will surely be a success. We have too many smutty magazines on the market now and it is a comfort to know that THE FRONTIER and SHORT STORIES can be brought into the home without first being subjected to close examination to determine if it is fit for my daughter to read. More power to you.

C. A. Smith,
Box 134,
Station A,
Worcester, Mass.

Here is one from an admirer of "Micky Malone":

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

Good name! Good magazine! I sure enjoyed "Micky Malone from San Antone." Guess it's because I am Irish.

I'm a hunter, trapper, horse-breaker, and dog-trainer.

I like stories with real pep in them, not old hasbeens. Have hunted, trapped and traveled some in quite a few states myself.

Am a reader of THE FRONTIER from now on.

Ray E. Hearn,
409 N. Lynn St.,
Bryan, Ohio.

And this reader makes a suggestion along a line we have been considering:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

I just finished reading the January issue of THE FRONTIER and to my mind it was the best issue you published. Every story was a "peach."

Why don't you have a Readers' Choice Coupon in your magazine just as in SHORT STORIES?

Thomas R. Lubey,
1992 Third Ave.,
New York City.

THE READERS' FAVORITE COUPON

FOLLOWING Mr. Lubey's suggestion, we shall run a Readers' Favorite Coupon in THE FRONTIER from now on. THE FRONTIER is your magazine; we want to make it please you in every way possible, but to do that we have to know what you like. The Readers' Favorite Coupon is your means of letting us know your preferences; it is your chance to help improve the magazine and make it one hundred per cent. perfect.

Printed on the coupon each issue you will find a list of the stories and articles appearing in that number. Simply place numerals from one to five beside the titles to indicate your choice, and mail the coupon to us. We'll do the rest. Moreover, we shall credit you with each coupon sent in, and for each four you fill in and send us we shall mail you, free of charge, one of the heading illustrations which appear in the magazine—a good-sized original pen and ink drawing, well suited for framing. Begin now, with the coupon above.

"You take the nearest brute, Colonel D'Hubert"—

Once they were gallant lieutenants in Napoleon's young army and had filled a prim garden with the angry clash of their arms. A petite maid watched their duel, horrified, and in that encounter Lieutenant Feraud had lost.

Long after their hatred lived on. As captains they crossed swords in the field of honor, and as majors, and each time victory changed hands.

How they were veterans, retreating from Moscow, caught in the shadowy snows by a band of Cossacks. Back to back against a tree, they made their defense and played out the strangest destiny known to fiction or life. Their story is told in the favorite novel by that master story teller, Joseph Conrad. It is one of the twelve stories we offer to you for the price of one.

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NORTH OF 53. By Rex Beach
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FREE

7 Pcs Genuine Cut Glass
EXTRA! EXTRA! Special Offer in addition to the amazing lamp bargain shown here:—***Absolutely Free,*** this beautiful 7-Piece Set of Genuine Cut Glass, consisting of: Pitcher of 2 quart capacity and 6 tumblers each of 9 oz. capacity. Each piece is pure, thin and dainty; ***hand cut decorations*** consisting of large floral design with appropriate foliage. Will make a handsome display among your glassware. We are giving away ***free,*** a limited number of these 7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Sets just to get new customers and to get them ***quickly.*** So read our offer now—and ***act today*** while these beautiful Cut Glass Sets last.

Gas or Electric

The Lamp

Comes equipped for choice of gas or electricity. Has 2-light Benjamin socket for electricity only, with 8-ft. silk cord ready for use; or comes with 6-ft. rubber hose, burner, mantle and chimney for gas.

Mahogany Finish

Standard is 69 in. high, 3 in. in diameter. Highly polished French mahogany finish.

The Shade

Made in Fifth Avenue design, 24 in. in diameter, of delft blue silk, shirred top, alternating plain and fancy art silk panels. 12 panels in all, tinsel braid border with 2-in. Chenille fringe. American beauty shirred lining. The harmonious color scheme gives effect of red light shining through a blue haze—a rich warm light. Shipping weight, 27 pounds.

Marshall Silky Fringe Pull-Cords

Also pair of Marshall silky fringe cords with 3½ in. silky fringed tassels, giving an added luxurious effect.

7-Piece Cut Glass Set FREE

For gas use, order by No. G8000A.
For electricity, order by No. G8001A.
Send only $1.00 with the coupon, $2.00 monthly. Total Bargain Price for lamp and shade, $19.85.

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Shows thousands of bargains in home furnishings: furniture, jewelry, rugs, curtains, phonographs, stoves, dishes, aluminum ware, etc. All sold on easy terms. Catalog sent free, with or without order. See coupon.

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Brings this

Floor Lamp

With 5th Ave. Silk Shade

(And 7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE)

Here is something you have always wanted—a beautiful floor lamp with handsome and elegant Fifth Avenue silk shade—to add an extra tone of elegance and luxury to your home. On this generous offer you can see just how this floor lamp and silk shade will look in your home, without risking anything. Send only $1.00 with the coupon below, and we will send it complete to your home on approval, equipped for use with either gas or electricity. We take all the risk. *Special now—7-Piece Set Genuine Cut Glass FREE!*

30 Days Trial—$2.00 a Month

Only $1.00 with coupon brings this smashing bargain on 30 Days Trial. When the lamp outfit comes, use it freely for 30 days. If you decide to keep it, pay only $2.00 monthly until you have paid the total bargain price of $19.85. If you decide to return it, we will refund your $1.00 deposit, plus any freight or express charges you have paid. No risk to you. Send coupon Now!

Price Slashed—Send Coupon NOW!

Decide now to see this beautiful floor lamp and silk shade in your home on approval on this price smashing offer. Think how the nickels and dimes slip away for useless things; save them for something **worth while** that gives satisfaction for years. Send coupon with only $1.00 now! Satisfaction guaranteed. **7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass FREE to those who order at once.**

This bargain offer is limited—send the coupon now while this offer lasts.

Straus & Schram, Dept. 1844 Chicago Ill.

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised Floor Lamp and Silk Shade as checked below with 7-Pieces Genuine Cut Glass Free. I am to have 30 days free trial. If I keep the lamp, I will send $2.00 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the lamp and shade and 7-piece cut glass set within 30 days and you are to refund my $1 plus all transportation charges.

☐ *Gas* Floor Lamp No. G8000A, $19.85 } 7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set Free
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